

LICENSE TO KILL? THE RISK TO CHECHENS INSIDE RUSSIA



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Executive Summary

Ramzan Kadyrov's regime in Chechnya is intolerant, violent, authoritarian and largely uncontrolled by national-level laws and structures. His personal enemies face violence or intimidation both within and without the country, and likewise his security apparatus and elite have considerable, if lesser, means and latitude to persecute anyone they choose. This extends to a degree in the rest of the Russian Federation, beyond Chechnya's borders, but widespread assumptions about the impunity with which they operate and their capacity to find and target whomever they choose are, on examination, over-simplifications.

In practice, there are clear distinctions between the threats to those formally convicted of offences, under investigation, and targeted for informal persecution. Despite the role of national databases and registration laws allowing people to be traced, given that the wider Russian security and law enforcement community is often unwilling to act as Chechen enforcers, there is some scope for victims to find anonymity and security within Russia – but very much depending on their specific circumstances.

A Note on Sources

Much of this is based on open source research in the Russian and other media, as well as government reports. However, in the interests of producing as definitive and detailed an analysis as possible, the researcher also spoke – both in person and by telephone/internet – with a number of individuals in Russia including serving and past government and law enforcement officers, civil society activists and journalists. It is a mark of the widespread fear engendered by Kadyrov and his state that most requested that their anonymity be preserved. In footnotes, I provide as much information as is safe about them such as to provide a sense of how authoritative their perspectives may be, and insofar as is possible I also support their examples and assertions with materials from other and open sources.

Extralegal Persecution and the Chechen Government

That the Chechen government engages in brutal and arbitrary, extralegal persecution of its enemies real and imagined at home is generally accepted.¹ From active political rivals of the regime, through those assumed to sympathise with them, to journalists and anyone with views or lifestyles to which Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is hostile – from LGBT+ to Sunni Muslims – these individuals may experience intimidation, detention, physical abuse and even murder. This report takes that as given. However, a few specific points do need to be made:

Assumptions about 'Wahhabism'

Chechen and Russian official sources tend to use the term 'Wahhabism' (Ваххабизм) as their generic term of Salafi or similar jihadism. Despite Kadyrov's efforts to reach out to Saudi Arabia,

¹ For a representative sample of authoritative perspectives, see Human Rights Watch, *Worse Than a War: "Disappearances" in Chechnya—a Crime Against Humanity* (2005) <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/chechnya0305/chechnya0305.pdf>>; International Crisis Group, *Chechnya: The Inner Abroad* (2015) <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/russianorth-caucasus/chechnya-inner-abroad>>; OSCE, *OSCE Rapporteur's Report under the Moscow Mechanism on alleged Human Rights Violations and Impunity in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation* (2018), <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/407402>>; EASO, *Country of Origin Information Report: Russian Federation: The situation for Chechens in Russia* (2018) <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1442027/4792_1535636056_chechens-in-rf.pdf>; Amnesty International, *Chechnya: Persecuted for defending human rights* (2019) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/02/chechnya-persecuted-for-defending-human-rights/>>

since 2016 the official line in Grozny is that Wahhabism is not part of Sunni Islam,² and Human Rights Watch has noted that the term is ‘widely employed with pejorative connotations to designate dissident Islamist movements and militants inspired by radical Islam.’³ Being considered a Wahhabist is thus not simply a theological label but often tantamount to being branded a terrorist (or active supporter of terrorism), facing prolonged periods of detention and abusive interrogation – if not worse – and can happen for the flimsiest of reasons. For example, Tumso Abdurakhmanov, a Sunni Moslem with no particular political opinions and a middle-level managerial job in a telecommunications firm, happened to catch the eye of Islam Kadyrov (Ramzan Kadyrov’s cousin and head of his Presidential Administration) He took objection to Abdurakhmanov’s beard and the religious affiliation it represented. This chance encounter led to Abdurakhmanov being detained, threatened, forced to flee Chechnya and then pursued internationally.⁴

Various Motivations

While real or alleged allegiance to Wahhabist or other anti-government forces is the more common basis for extralegal persecutions in Chechnya, it is by no means the only one. Opposition to Kadyrov and his regime is clearly treated with extreme prejudice. At present, there is also a particular campaign against LGBT+ individuals, largely men, which has led to detentions, abuses and even killings, as Kadyrov asserts it is necessary to ‘purify our blood.’⁵ Then there are also capricious and personal vendettas, often motivated by family feuds, business rivalries, or attempts to extort money, often prosecuted under the guise of being counter-terrorism operations.

Collective Coercion

Although formally banned under Russian Federation law – and directly criticised by President Putin⁶ – the Chechen regime extensively and enthusiastically practices collective punishment. Family homes of suspected ‘terrorists’ are burned down or demolished, regardless of who else lives there; and families are either used as virtual hostages to encourage targets to turn themselves in or punished themselves for their relatives’ real or alleged misdeeds, as discussed below. Kadyrov himself makes no bones about this, publicly warning that

‘father will be held responsible for his son’s actions... If you gave birth to a child, you have to be accountable. A father will be held accountable for his son, a mother for her daughter.’⁷

² ‘Валлахи, перестань. Чеченец, говоришь – делай’, *Kavkaz.Realii*, 6 June 2019 <<https://www.kavkazr.com/a/wallahi-perestan/29970237.html>>

³ Human Rights Watch, “*Like Walking a Minefield*” *Vicious Crackdown on Critics in Russia’s Chechen Republic*, 31 August 2016 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/08/31/walking-minefield/vicious-crackdown-critics-russias-chechen-republic>>

⁴ ‘Lepiej, żeby zabili mnie w Polsce,’ *Onet*, 24 October 2018 <<https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/czy-tumso-abdurachmanow-zostanie-odeslany-do-czecenii/13whkhc>>

⁵ ‘Chechen Refugee Vows To Sue Over Report He Was Caught Up In Gay Purge’”, *RFERL*, 5 February 2019 <<https://www.rferl.org/a/chechen-refugee-vows-to-sue-over-report-he-was-caught-up-in-gay-purge-29753121.html>>

⁶ ‘Как разрушают дома в Чечне’, *Kavkazskii uzел*, 24 December 2014 <<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/253822/>>

⁷ Video from Memorial materials, cited in ICG, *Chechnya: The Inner Abroad* (2015), p. 9 fn. 54 <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/russianorth-caucasus/chechnya-inner-abroad>>

Authoritarian Adhocracy

The Russian system in general can be characterised as an ‘adhocracy’ – one in which, contrary to commonplace assumptions about rigid control through the so-called ‘power vertical,’ instead numerous individuals, factions, interests and agencies compete both to further their own agendas and also those of the state. Sometimes they are directly tasked from above, sometimes operating on their assumptions based on hints and indications from the Kremlin, and sometimes acting on their own initiative, counting on retrospective approval or simply indulgence.⁸

Although Kadyrov is a more ruthless and hands-on leader than Vladimir Putin, nonetheless there is a similar pattern. Many acts of persecution are generated from within the security apparatus or by individuals within the elite, rather than coming directly from Kadyrov or through official judicial processes. However, a clear element of the informal social contract between Kadyrov and his elites is that he will defend them, even if they are operating without his orders or explicit sanction. In 2015, for example, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was murdered in Moscow literally in view of the Kremlin, by members of Kadyrov’s security apparatus.⁹ According to multiple sources within the Russian law enforcement and security community, this was carried out not under direct orders from Kadyrov, but in the belief that it was what he wanted.¹⁰ Kadyrov, in turn, sought to protect those responsible for giving the orders, and called the actual gunman ‘a true patriot’ on Instagram.¹¹ Thus, persecution initiated by lower-level figures within the Chechen apparatus is likely to be treated with indulgence rather than reined in. However, it is important to note that such abuses are likely to be backed with much less authority and resources, especially outside Chechnya’s borders. As a Russian crime correspondent who had considerable knowledge of Chechen affairs put it,

‘No one will cross Ramzan, but people are much less willing to jump just because one of his people are after someone. It depends totally, totally, on quite who they are – and what they are willing to offer.’¹²

A Lack of Constraints

Ramzan Kadyrov and the Chechen security apparatus are largely allowed to operate with impunity by Moscow, so long as they do not cause too great an embarrassment or problem. When Overall, while there is often a reluctance actively to *assist* extralegal persecutions from Grozny, nor is there generally any enthusiasm to *prevent* them. Higher courts, for example, are notoriously unwilling to challenge rulings from Chechen courts, especially in cases relating to Chechens. When noted local journalist for the critical Caucasus Knot outlet Zhalaudi Geriyev was sentenced to three years in prison on deeply-suspect drugs charges – after he had been kidnapped and

⁸ For more on Russia’s ‘adhocracy,’ see ‘Russia has no grand plans, but lots of “adhocrats”’, *Business New Europe*, 18 January 2018 <<https://www.intellinews.com/stolypin-russia-has-no-grand-plans-but-lots-of-adhocrats-114014/>>; ‘What the Mueller Report Tells Us About How Russia Works,’ *Moscow Times*, 19 April 2019 <<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/19/what-the-mueller-report-tells-us-about-how-russia-works-a65310>>

⁹ ‘Расстрел у Кремля: в Москве убит Борис Немцов’, *RBC*, 28 February 2015 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/02/2015/54f0e3719a7947d2f39fb66d>>; ‘Следственный тупик’, *Novaya gazeta*, 28 February 2018 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/02/27/75636-sledstvennyy-tupik>>

¹⁰ In particular, an officer of the Investigatory Committee, who was involved in the preliminary investigation of the killing (conversation, March 2015; conversation, April 2016); a major in the Moscow police (conversation, April 2015); and a recently-retired officer from the Moscow directorate of the Federal Security Service, who had briefly provided operational support to the investigation (email, January 2017).

¹¹ ‘Putin’s closest ally – and his biggest liability’, *Guardian*, 23 September 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/23/putins-closest-ally-and-his-biggest-liability>>

¹² Conversation, Moscow, 2019

tortured to extract a confession – the Supreme Court in Moscow refused to have his appeal considered.¹³ Indeed, when Chechens have sought to turn to the federal authorities for protection, they have instead simply placed themselves in danger. In 2017, for example, a family turned to the General Prosecutor when Chechen police allegedly assaulted young men from their community, claiming they were Wahhabists. The General Prosecutor's Office refused to open an investigation, but the local police returned and beat the complainants for their temerity.¹⁴

The failure to control abusive behaviour covers not just Kadyrov and his immediate circle, but also the Chechen security forces as a whole. As OSCE rapporteur Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benedek noted, 'not a single case is known where a member of [Chechen] the state security services has been brought to justice for human rights violations.'¹⁵ This is hardly surprising given the open encouragement of extralegal practices. In 2013, for example, Deputy Interior Minister Apti Alaudinov gave the following advice to a regional police chief on how to deal with Wahhabists:

'I'm personally saying to mow them down. Those you can, throw in prison. If there's an opportunity to plant something in his pocket, do it. Do what you want, and kill whomever you want. The ruler [Kadyrov] said to pass this on... I swear by Allah, I support this.'¹⁶

No Statute of Limitations

Kadyrov has made clear his view that his enmity has no statute of limitations. He notoriously once warned his critics that

'One day, maybe in ten or five years, when you become smarter or when parents tell you to come home or when they chase you out of Europe, you will not have anywhere to go. And then I will make you pay for every word.'¹⁷

His example and also to continuing influence of the traditional Chechen honour code known as *adat* means that disputes and enmities take the characteristic of a blood feud. While *legal* cases are subject to a statute of limitations, the underlying disputes which often are behind them are assumed to continue until there is an active resolution, whether the meting out of vengeance or a formal apology or expiation.

No Way Back

This reflects the relative absence of means to address and end persecution. Formally speaking, Chechnya essentially maintains the same judicial structure as the rest of the Russian Federation, although religious Sharia Courts – technically illegal under Russian law, but their presence demonstrates Kadyrov's effective autonomy within his own fiefdom – do also operate in parallel. In theory, this means there is the scope to appeal court judgements and seek redress, but in practice even by Russian Federation standards, this is extremely unlikely. When individuals do manage to bring persecution to an end, this is more likely to be through personal connections or

¹³ 'Key facts about Geriev's case: from kidnapping to appeal', *Caucasus Knot*, 16 May 2019 <<https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/37713/>>

¹⁴ 'Итоги акции устрашения чеченского поселка Красная Турбина: жителей избили в РОВД за обращение к генпрокурору, задержанные признали свою вину', *Novaya Gazeta*, 17 August 2017 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/08/17/134493-byut-byut-byut>>

¹⁵ OSCE, *OSCE Rapporteur's Report under the Moscow Mechanism on alleged Human Rights Violations and Impunity in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation* (2018), p. 32 <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/407402>>

¹⁶ He said this at a meeting in Urus-Martin, which was recorded: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZS3d-habuE&feature=youtu.be>

¹⁷ Cited in *openDemocracy*, 5 November 2018 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/tumso-abdurakhmanov/>>

a public apology and plea for clemency. When Ramazan Dzhaldinov began to face threats after he criticised aspects of his local administration, even after he had fled Chechnya, he was forced to make a public apology to Kadyrov in a video that was then broadcast on Chechen TV. In return, Kadyrov ‘forgave’ him and allowed him and his family to return to their home village – although their home had already been burnt down.¹⁸ Even so, this is also a capricious process, with no guarantees of success or that what is granted today will continue tomorrow.

No Boundaries

Kadyrov’s regime does not keep itself to itself, and his political ambitions are visible in a range of policy areas.¹⁹ He is trying to annex parts of neighbouring Ingushetia and assert his authority over the North Caucasus in general.²⁰ He virtually prosecutes his own autonomous foreign policy, which has included making scarcely-veiled threats to neighbouring countries (such as against Georgia when anti-Russian protests broke out in June 2019²¹). This overall pattern is also very visible in the activities of both the Chechen state and also figures within its security apparatus and political elite, operating possibly autonomously, in persecuting perceived enemies. As is discussed elsewhere, this has included high-profile figures in Russia such as Boris Nemtsov, as well as targets abroad, and the active intimidation of critics from politics to the media.

Persecution through the Russian judicial and security structures

The Chechen Republic is formally a part of the Russian Federation. Although Kadyrov has comprehensively packed the police, security agencies and courts with his own loyalists, such that their real authority is to him (the security forces are largely made up of so-called ‘Kadyrovtsy,’ ‘Kadyrovites,’ who swear a personal oath of loyalty²²), they are also connected with the rest of the Russian Federation power structures. As a result, the Chechen branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the local Investigatory Committee and Prosecutor’s Office, and the republican Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the like can draw on the resources of their counterparts across the country. This extends to issuing arrest warrants and adding ‘watch notices’ and similar flags to national databases (including, as will be discussed below, the ones used to check identity documents entering and leaving the country), with the expectation that they will be enforced.

It is certainly the case that the courts and police in Russia will enforce legal arrest warrants issued in Chechnya, which will usually lead to transfer back to Chechnya for trial or serving of a sentence. In 2017, for example, mixed martial arts fighter Murad Amriyev – who had fled Chechnya claiming

¹⁸ ‘Рамазан Джалалдинов заявил о попытках подкупа его родственников’, *Kavkazskii uzel*, 3 May 2016 <<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/281897/>>; ‘Chechnya: The power of public humiliation’, *Al-Jazeera*, 2 July 2016 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/06/chechnya-power-public-humiliation-160623111855166.html>>

¹⁹ For a useful overview of Kadyrov’s Chechnya as a cross-border actor, see Uwe Halbach, *Chechnya’s Status within the Russian Federation*, SWP Research Paper (2018), pp. 26-29 <https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2018RP02_hlb.pdf>

²⁰ See, for example, ‘Send Chechens, guns and money’, *Foreign Affairs*, 4 February 2019 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/chechnya/2019-02-04/send-chechens-guns-and-money>>; ‘Chechnya’s Ramzan Kadyrov Makes Territorial Claims on Neighboring Ingushetia’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 27 September 2018 <<https://jamestown.org/program/chechnyas-ramzan-kadyrov-makes-territorial-claims-on-neighboring-ingushetia/>>

²¹ Notably in warning that ‘It is only 200 kilometres from Grozny to Tbilisi.’ ‘Кадыров напомнил, что «от Грозного до Тбилиси всего 200 км»’, *Izvestiya*, 22 June 2019 <<https://iz.ru/891796/2019-06-22/kadyrov-napomnil-chto-ot-groznogo-do-tbilisi-vsego-200-kilometrov>>

²² ‘Kadyrovtsy: “Vladimir Putin’s Combat Infantry” and Ramzan Kadyrov’s Henchmen’, *The Interpreter*, 10 June 2015 <<http://www.interpretermag.com/kadyrovtsy-vladimir-putins-combat-infantry-and-ramzan-kadyrovs-henchmen/>>

he was the subject of a ‘blood feud’ with local police – was arrested on a train in Bryansk region when returning to Russia from Ukraine, and extradited to Grozny.²³

However, as discussed below, not all Chechen-related cases make their way into the national databases, and the poor relations between the Chechen and other Russian security agencies mean that the latter are often sceptical of claims from Grozny. There is a distinct difference between the treatment of those who have been convicted of crimes in Chechnya, and those merely accused of them, not least because of the question of resources. A Vladivostok police officer, asked if he would look for a Chechen thought to be in his district, who was wanted for questioning by Grozny, was forthright:

‘I wouldn’t bother. If he was a real terrorist, then it would be the “big brothers” [ie, FSB or Investigatory Committee] who would be looking for him. If the guy was pulled in on another charge or otherwise brought himself to our attention, then I might have him sent back home just to get him off our hands. But otherwise...’²⁴

Location

While any Chechen citizen has the right to relocate anywhere within Russian Federation, he or she could still be located by the agencies of the state. Russia has an internal passport system, a remnant of Soviet-era *propiska* population controls whereby all citizens must carry a document indicating their registered residence and workplace. This provides a quick and easy way to track someone, and one which is now fully computerised. Individuals can only provide temporary registration by post; for a new permanent address (needed for all kinds of services and also to get passports and the like), they have to register in person at a local MVD office, at one of the new Multifunctional Centres (which bring together various state offices) or online through the Gosuslugi (‘State Services’) portal.²⁵

According to a Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) official based in Moscow, while many of the registration-related checks are either not likely to generate an immediate response or not directly connected, they are increasingly networked and at the very least maintain a record of queries. In other words, even if the Chechen authorities subsequently seek to locate an individual, they will be able to access – through their local FMS or MVD – not just an individual’s current registered residence, but also their past record of residences and travels.²⁶

²³ ‘Полиция задержала разыскиваемого в Чечне чемпиона мира по ММА,’ *RBC*, 5 June 2017 <<https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5935292a9a794798bd0d7f0d>>; ‘В Чечне прекратили уголовное дело против бойца ММА Амриева,’ *Interfax*, 15 June 2017 <<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/566750>>; for more, older examples, see EASO, *Country of Origin Information Report: Russian Federation: The situation for Chechens in Russia* (2018), pp. 69-70 <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1442027/4792_1535636056_chechens-in-rf.pdf>

²⁴ Email conversation, 2018. The officer is a police captain, and thus responsible for a *raion*, or neighbourhood police precinct.

²⁵ Detailed information on temporary and permanent registration and the laws and procedures around them can be found in EASO, *Country of Origin Information Report: Russian Federation: The situation for Chechens in Russia* (2018), pp. 17-25 <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1442027/4792_1535636056_chechens-in-rf.pdf>

²⁶ This represents a change from the situation described in the Danish Immigration Service’s report *Security and Human Rights in Chechnya and the Situation of Chechens in the Russian Federation – residence registration, racism and false accusations*, January 2015, 1/2015 ENG, which states (p. 68) that ‘the quality of the exchange of information between authorities in Russia is poor and it may be that a person who is wanted or searched by some authorities can go unnoticed when purchasing train tickets despite the fact that their internal passport and name is registered.’

Individuals cannot escape registration without putting themselves at risk of prosecution and denying themselves necessary benefits because it is illegal and also required for employment, renting accommodation, long-distance travel and the like. In the short term, it is possible to 'go to ground,' especially by staying with friends and relatives. However, if there is an active investigation, then this is precisely where the authorities first will look. More to the point, in the longer-term, any fugitives need either to purchase new identities on the black market for forged documents or register. The police and other services routinely check registration documents (especially, to be honest, those of anyone looking as if they hail from the North Caucasus) so any such fugitives would have to pay regular bribes and become vulnerable to a new collection of predators. Besides, a range of basic social benefits are linked to the district of registered residence, and such fugitives deprive themselves – and their dependants – of access to education, banking, state medical care, or the ability to renew passports or driving licenses.

Entering the Russian Federation

One specific aspect of the above point is the likelihood of being detected and detained while crossing Russian Federation borders. First of all, this requires an international passport, a biometric document that is separate from the regular internal passport. This has to be applied for specially and involves checking documents, including querying a series of national database that will flag up whether the applicant is wanted for any crimes, has unpaid debts, owes tax, or is otherwise not eligible (the FSB and presumably other security agencies can, for example, flag a record either with a note that a passport not be issued, or else with a request the FMS first check with a particular case officer²⁷). Then the applicant must attend in person for biometric scanning, and then later to collect the document. Simply acquiring an international passport thus brings the applicant more forcefully to the attention of the authorities.

Then a Russian citizen can travel in and out of the country without need for an exit visa but nonetheless subject to presenting his or her documents when heading in both directions. The Border Troops (PV) – who are part of the Federal Security Service – will generally run the passport through their unified database as a matter of course. This should (there are sometimes the inevitably bureaucratic omissions and errors) also flag up any outstanding arrest warrants or the 'watch notices' that any security agency can add to a citizen's record. Depending on the content, this can do anything from trigger immediate detention, to temporary delay while a decision is sought, to nothing more than sending a notification to the original agency. What must be stressed is that it is extremely unlikely that any Russian citizen can legally cross the border without this fact being recorded, and the PV applying any instructions placed in the file. Crossing the border without going through a PV control point is illegal under Article 322 of the Russian Criminal Code.

The Russia-Belarus Border

It is also worth noting that although until 2016, documents were not checked when crossing the Russia-Belarus border, since then abbreviated controls have been reinstated as a result of Minsk's decision to introduce limited visa-free travel into Belarus. The main purpose of these checks by the PV is to screen out foreigners who need Russian visas from Russian and Belarusian citizens, nonetheless this does mean that documents will still be subject to basic checks. Belarus is by no means a safe haven for Chechens. In 2017, for example, Luiza Dudurkayeva was stopped at Minsk airport when about to head to Helsinki, even though she had been issued refugee documents and a Schengen visa by Norway. She had fled Chechnya after falling foul of the

²⁷ This was confirmed to me by a recently-retired FSB officer who had been working for its Service for Protection of the Constitutional System and the Fight against Terrorism, in a conversation in Moscow in June 2014

officially-sanctioned Carthage (Карфаген) ‘morality police’ movement.²⁸ Although she was a 22-year-old adult, she had been officially listed as ‘missing’ and was eventually released into the custody of her father and taken from the airport.²⁹

Interpol

Moscow has a track record of misusing Interpol, and especially its Red Notices (international arrest notices), against political targets, something the Council of Europe has called ‘deplorable,’ calling Russia out as one of the countries misusing ‘Interpol and its system of red notices ... for political purposes in recent years to suppress freedom of expression or to persecute political opponents abroad.’³⁰ Even by Russian standards, Grozny is especially assiduous in using Red Notices against those it is persecuting, typically alleging involvement with terrorism.³¹ Victims of such practice have included both high-profile political enemies of the regime such as former rebel spokesman Akhmad Zakayev³² as well as random victims of spite, vendettas or mistaken identity. A search of the Interpol Red Notices database reveals hundreds of Chechen names, disproportionately on terrorism-related charges. These have led to a number of extraditions, and those returned to Russia/Chechnya face a serious risk of then simply disappearing, like Azamat Baiduyev (deported from Poland in 2018)³³ and Aslan Yandiyev (an Ingushetian, but accused of being part of a Chechen rebel group, deported from Slovakia in 2018).³⁴

It is worth noting that the Interpol National Central Bureau for Russia, the sole contact point for such communications, is in the main Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in Moscow. In other words, the Chechen authorities cannot issue such notices themselves, but must relay their requests through Moscow, requests which the central government seems disinclined to refuse. An MVD officer with direct knowledge of the activities of the Russian NCB said that he could not remember any such requests being turned down, as ‘it would be politically difficult, and certainly

²⁸ To be clear, Carthage was officially sanctioned – and supported – by Grozny, not Moscow. Later that year, its Vkontakte social media site was, for example, closed down by the federal Ministry of Communications under its anti-extremism rules.

²⁹ ‘Бежавшую от травли чеченку не пустили из Минска в Хельсинки,’ *UNIAN*, 5 September 2017 <<https://www.unian.net/world/2115586-bejavshuyu-ot-travli-chechenku-ne-pustili-iz-minska-v-helsinki.html>>; ‘“Карфаген” и его жертва,’ *Radio Svoboda*, 6 September 2017 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/28719536.html>>

³⁰ *RFE/RL*, 26 April 2017, <<https://www.rferl.org/a/interpol-res-noticies-abused-russia-iran/28453825.html>>

³¹ There are also the less formal “diffusion notices” which are sent directly from one country’s Interpol National Central Bureau to others. These may be treated as seriously as Red Notices, but as they are not made public in the same way, it is impossible definitively to say how many of these have been used against those targeted by Grozny.

³² ‘Former Chechen rebel Akhmed Zakayev released from arrest in Warsaw,’ *Telegraph* 18 September 2010 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/8011079/Former-Chechen-rebel-Akhmed-Zakayev-released-from-arrest-in-Warsaw.html>>

³³ Amnesty International, ‘Russia: Chechen refugee forcibly disappeared after being unlawfully deported from Poland’, 3 September 2018 <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/russi-chechen-refugee-forcibly-disappeared-after-being-unlawfully-deported-from-poland/>>

³⁴ ‘Slovakia has extradited Yandiev to Russia,’ *Slovak Spectator*, 18 July 2018 <<https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20873232/slovakia-has-extradited-yandiev-to-russia.html>>

above the pay grade of the head of the NCB to deny Kadyrov's lads anything.³⁵ This is especially true since the Kremlin also uses Interpol as an instrument to harass critics and enemies.³⁶

While national governments may choose to challenge or ignore Red Notices, which have no independent evidentiary or probative value, what is of particular relevance here is that in a circular process, being nominated for a Red Notice by the Russian NCB ensures that, whether or not the central Interpol apparatus considers this a legitimate use of the system, the individual will be flagged on Russian databases as a criminal suspect, to be detained on detection.

Extradition and Rendition

All that said, it is very difficult to find examples of cases in which Chechens detained elsewhere in the Russian Federation have been returned to Chechnya (excluding those who were convicted in other regions and applied to serve their sentences in Chechnya, typically to be closer to their families) unless there has been an actual conviction and the individual is a fugitive from justice. Subjects of major investigations may be another matter, as may be the case when individuals are detained because of automatic requirements, such as if an individual is caught trying to enter or leave the country when a watch notice has been placed on their record. Given the chronic overcrowding of SIZO pre-trial detention facilities, extradition to Grozny is often seen as a better option.³⁷

Likewise, although there is considerable 'urban mythology' about Chechen law enforcers operating with impunity across Russia, or else informal renditions to Chechnya, this seem less common than assumed (although several interlocutors suggested that this was more likely in neighbouring North Caucasus regions, where it was unlikely to attract wider attention³⁸). Such arrests as have been ascribed by some to Chechen security forces, such as that of Amriyev, covered above, actually turn out to have been carried out by local police. It is by no means unknown, though, but may be the result of family rather than government-level initiative and in cases such attempted kidnappings have actually been foiled by the local security forces. In July 2018, for example, four Chechens – at least one of whom had Chechen police papers – seized Zelimkhan Akhmadov in St Petersburg. Akhmadov had fled Chechnya the year before because of his LGBT+ orientation, facing threats from the police and family alike. He was taken to a hostel in St Petersburg where his father (a powerful businessman in Chechnya) met him and tried to persuade him to make a video statement renouncing his sexual orientation, but the St Petersburg police were able to find and release him.³⁹

³⁵ The MVD officer did not work directly for the NCB, but was in a managerial position to have direct knowledge of its activities, 2011-17. Email communication, March 2018.

³⁶ For a detailed study of this issue, see David Satter, *Russia's Abuse of Interpol*, Henry Jackson Society Policy Paper 6 (2015) <<https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Russias-Abuse-of-Interpol.pdf>>

³⁷ An MVD official who had been involved with penal policy in 2012-15 told me that efforts to reduce overcrowding in SIZO facilities were in part intended to end this practice of 'passing on the problem.' When asked if detainees might be sent to Chechnya as a result, his reply was 'for sure: to everywhere.' Conversation, Moscow, 2016

³⁸ A worker at a human rights NGO, for example, told me by email in January 2019 that Ingushetian police had recounted a case in February or March 2018 in which a young man whose brother had been accused of being a terrorist and who was studying in Nazran, was in effect kidnapped by Chechen police. The local police chief allegedly had told his men not to interfere. However, the worker was unable to provide more details and I have not found any further references to such a case.

³⁹ '«Это наш мужчина, наши дела, и мы сами разберемся»', *Novaya gazeta*, 16 July 2018 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/07/16/77180-eto-nash-muzhchina-nashi-dela-i-my-sami-razberemsa>>

A crucial factor seems to be the poor relationship between the Chechen power structures and those of both their neighbours and the all-Russian agencies in Moscow. In the most extreme case, in 2013 a number of FSB officers briefly went on hunger strike in protest when three Chechen policemen accused of kidnapping and torturing a man in Moscow were released.⁴⁰ Then, when Kadyrovtsy murdered opposition politician Boris Nemtsov in Moscow in 2015, it was an open secret that the heads of the FSB and MVD were agitating to have Kadyrov punished.⁴¹ Talk of Kadyrov being able to muster a thousand – or even thousands – of loyalists in Moscow, able and willing to act openly against the law are also highly questionable. There certainly are many Chechens, including both gangsters linked to Chechnya and the security details of Chechen politicians and businesspeople, and they undoubtedly act in a high-handed way, using blue *migalka* emergency lights on their cars, carrying concealed (and open) weapons and ignoring traffic rules.⁴²

In this, though, they are not unlike other senior members of the Russian elite, albeit perhaps in slightly more brazen form. While their unauthorised use of emergency road lanes and tendency to throw their weight around in public spaces is generally ignored by the authorities, though, when they cross the tacit line between acceptable and improper behaviour, they tend to face sanctions, both formal and informal. A Moscow police officer and MVD officer both independently volunteered that the situation had become more controlled than in 2012 when, infamously, a team of eleven Kadyrovtsy were arrested in the city after kidnapping and beating a man in an extortion racket.⁴³ The Chechens were ultimately released and not charged, in return for their returning to Chechnya and giving assurances that they would stay there. Nonetheless, this caused something of a furore within the Moscow police and since then, there has been a greater determination to control these ‘guests.’ For example, in 2018, two Chechen police officers accused of trying to shake down a businessman in Moscow were put on trial in 2018 and convicted, for example, despite the personal intercession of Chechen leaders up to Adam Delimkhanov, Kadyrov’s cousin and the ruling United Russia party elected representative for Chechnya.⁴⁴ There are also fewer than a hundred officers formally accredited to the Chechen security forces, entitled to operate in Moscow.⁴⁵

It is one thing, after all, to have hardwired access to central databases and the like, quite enough to expect active cooperation in anything other than serious criminal cases and the enforcement of court judgements. In the words of one national-level MVD official,

⁴⁰ ‘Москва-Юрт’, *Novaya gazeta*, 25 March 2013 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2013/03/25/54083-moskva-yurt>>; ‘Сотрудники ФСБ анонимно пожаловались на освобождение охранников Кадырова,’ *News.ru*, 25 March 2013 <<https://www.newsru.com/russia/25mar2013/kadyrov.html>>

⁴¹ This was confirmed to me at the time by multiple MVD, FSB and other ‘insider’ sources in Moscow.

⁴² ‘Вооруженные «кадыровцы» в Москве как чеченский феномен’, *Prestupnaya Rossiya*, 29 February 2016 <<https://crimerussia.com/gromkie-dela/vooruzhennye-kadyrovtsy-v-moskve-kak-chechenskiy-fenomen/>>

⁴³ ‘По праву Стечкина’, *Novaya gazeta*, 15 April 2012 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2012/04/16/49287-po-pravu-stechkina>>

⁴⁴ ‘Чеченские коллекторы-полицейские пойдут под суд в Москве за вымогательство в составе ОПГ’, *Prestupnaya Rossiya*, 5 April 2018 <<https://crimerussia.com/organizedcrime/chechenskie-kollektory-politseyskie-poydut-pod-sud-v-moskve-za-vymogatelstvo-v-sostave-opg/>>

⁴⁵ ‘У банды чеченских коллекторов в Москве нашли сотни долговых расписок и уголовное дело Немцова’, *Prestupnaya Rossiya*, 18 August 2018 <<https://crimerussia.com/organizedcrime/u-bandy-chechenskikh-kollektorov-v-moskve-nashli-sotni-dolgovykh-raspisok-i-ugolovnoe-delo-nemtsova/>>

'no one trusts Kadyrov's people, no one is going to go out of their way to help them... And honestly, the Chechens understand that and don't tend to look for cooperation when they don't have [official documentation] compelling it.'⁴⁶

This official explicitly excluded cases which had already gone to trial (such that this was a case of enforcing a sentence) and investigations where there was a clear evidence of a crime having been committed or major terrorism and organised crime cases, which tended to be handled by the FSB or the Investigatory Committee. A lawyer who used to work in the General Prosecutor's Office concurs, saying that Chechnya-related 'police cases that aren't serious enough to be picked up by prosecutors or the FSB aren't usually serious enough for anyone to care about.'⁴⁷

In other words, although it is difficult to prove a negative, it seems unlikely that a Chechen facing persecution from Chechnya would experience active mistreatment elsewhere in Russia unless either a court judgement had already been passed or else other agencies – essentially FSB, General Prosecutor's Office, Investigatory Committee – were convinced that there was a substantive political or organised crime case in play.

Direct Violence and Intimidation

Kadyrov's regime is demonstrably brutal and authoritarian, and the same tactics it uses to maintain its control over Chechnya can be exported beyond its borders, using both force and its threat.

Assassination

At the other end of the spectrum, Chechen persecutors – both acting under Kadyrov's orders and on their own initiative – have been involved in outright murder both within and beyond Russia's borders. Abroad, killings with connections to the Chechen state that have been proven or credibly asserted by the local authorities include the murders of rebel sympathisers in Turkey in 2009, 2015 and 2016,⁴⁸ an anti-Russian rebel commander in Kyiv in 2017⁴⁹ and rival Chechen warlord Sulim Yamadayev, murdered in Dubai in 2009 by, according to the police, Kadyrov's cousin and representative in Moscow, Adam Delimkhanov.⁵⁰ Within Russia itself, the targets have largely been not small-scale targets (who disappear with considerable frequency inside Chechnya itself), but serious political figures who fell foul of Kadyrov himself. These include opposition politician Boris Nemtsov (shot in Moscow, 2015) and more clan warlords of the Yamadayev family (including Ruslan Yamadayev in Moscow⁵¹), human rights campaigner Nataliya Estemirova (according to Oleg Orlov, director of the human rights organisation Memorial, Kadyrov

⁴⁶ Conversation, Moscow, 2014

⁴⁷ The individual worked in the General Prosecutor's Office for eleven years, including a stint in Moscow handling inter-regional cases. Telephone conversation, May 2019

⁴⁸ 'Murder of Chechen in Turkey Just Latest in Series of Apparent Russian Killings Abroad', *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 21 April 2016 <<https://jamestown.org/program/murder-of-chechen-in-turkey-just-latest-in-series-of-apparent-russian-killings-abroad-2/>>; 'Have Russian hitmen been killing with impunity in Turkey?', *BBC* 13 December 2016 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-38294204>>

⁴⁹ Timur Makhauri, who was killed by a car bomb in 2017. 'Погибший в Киеве Чеченец Был Личным Врагом Кадырова, Ему Угрожали', *DSNews*, 8 September 2017 <<http://www.dsnews.ua/society/pogibshiy-v-kieve-chechenets-byl-lichnym-vragom-kadyrova-emu-08092017194800>>

⁵⁰ *BBC*, 28 April 2009 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8022616.stm>>. This has never been proven in a court of law, as Moscow has refused to extradite Delimkhanov, but his Interpol Red Notice international arrest warrant remains live.

⁵¹ 'Bitter rival of Chechnya's leader is shot dead in Russian capital', *Guardian*, 26 September 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/26/chechnya.russia>>

threatened her shortly before she was abducted and murdered in Chechnya in 2009⁵²) and investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya (who was shot in Moscow in 2006 after Kadyrov called her an ‘enemy’⁵³).

Intimidation and Threats

A known propensity to use violence also permits the credible use of intimidation against those falling foul of Grozny. Kadyrov himself is not above such acts. In 2016, he used his Instagram account to post a video showing two leading opposition figures, Mikhail Kasyanov and Vladimir Kara-Murza, seen through a sniper’s telescopic sight, with the warning that “whoever doesn’t get it will get it.”⁵⁴ The same platform has been used by his allies and ministers, such as Press Minister Umarov, who threatened journalists of the Moscow-based newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* in a surreal video filmed with a duck.⁵⁵ When representatives of Memorial and other human rights organisations held a press conference in Moscow in 2014 to release a report on abuses in Chechnya, Kadyrov loyalists even threw eggs at them and accusing them of defending criminals.⁵⁶ These last may sound trivial, but as a human rights NGO worker noted,

‘they’re symbols. They are ways in which Kadyrov and his people can say “we can reach out and touch you. We know who you are, we know where you are, and who knows what it will be next time?” It’s all about showing that they know you, and they are not happy. It’s intimidation, nothing more.’⁵⁷

However, it is not only headline figures who face such treatment. When Chechen-born writer Arslan Khasavov wrote a story that the chair of the Chechen Union of Journalists considered a slur on his country, he was sued for defamation, his family at home were pressurised and he was then severely beaten in Moscow.⁵⁸ Likewise in 2016, for example, a Chechen was filmed humiliating two teenagers on the Moscow metro in the name of the Akhmat patriotic youth movement, named for Kadyrov’s father and very much his pet project. Kadyrov clearly took this personally. He issued an immediate and intemperate threat to the individual:

‘I suggest that you immediately, this very minute, take the very first flight from wherever you are to Grozny, and come to me with your family! Otherwise, they will find you in a

⁵² ‘Олег Орлов: «Это не последняя смерть»,’ *Radio Svoboda*, 15 July 2009 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/1777700.html>>

⁵³ ‘Kadyrov’s Menace Casts a Shadow Over Moscow’, *Moscow Times*, 30 March 2015 <<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/30/kadyrovs-menace-casts-a-shadow-over-moscow-a45266>>; ‘Ramzan Kadyrov: a challenge to the Kremlin,’ *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 28 April 2015 <https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ramzan_kadyrov_a_challenge_to_the_kremlin3013>

⁵⁴ See *BBC*, 2 February 2016 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-35477293/former-russian-pm-mikhail-kasyanov-shown-as-a-sniper-s-target>>

⁵⁵ The video is currently posted at <https://www.instagram.com/p/BteMTIBH0g/>. For the newspaper’s coverage, see ‘Нация страха’, *Novaya gazeta*, 6 February 2019 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/02/04/79426-natsiya-straha>>

⁵⁶ ‘Kadyrov Supporters Throw Eggs At Russian Rights Activists,’ *RFERL*, 11 December 2014 <<https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-supporters-throw-eggs-at-russian-rights-defenders/26737835.html>>; ‘«Мемориал» и «Гражданское содействие» опубликовали доклад о положении чеченцев в России’, *Vedomosti*, 19 January 2015 <<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2015/01/19/memorial-i-grazhdanskoe-sodejstvie-opublikovali-doklad-o>>

⁵⁷ Conversation, Moscow, 2019

⁵⁸ ‘В Чечне писатель подал иск о защите достоинства к председателю республиканского Союза журналистов’, *Kavkazskii uzel*, 23 February 2011 <<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/181421/>>; ‘На чеченского писателя Арслана Хасавова совершено покушение в Москве’, *Kavkazskii uzel*, 9 March 2011 <<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/182057/>>

matter of hours!... So, you only have a few hours to respond! Otherwise you will regret bitterly!⁵⁹

The young Chechen, Avtur Shalinskii, immediately issued a public apology, returned to Grozny and threw himself on Kadyrov's mercy.

Threat by Proxy

As noted above, the use of threat of violence or other forms of persecution extends to the family and even friends of targets. Ever since the outbreak of the Second Chechen War in 1999, there has been an established – if extralegal – practice whereby the security forces threaten, detain or even kill relatives of known or suspected militants either to encourage them to turn themselves in or as brutal deterrence. In 2004, for example, in dozens of members of the extended family of rebel leader Magomed Khambiyev were seized – one, his 19-year-old cousin (who had no known political connections), was abducted from his university, beaten severely, then left in Khambiyev's home village as a warning.⁶⁰ On a smaller scale, and with lower-profile victims, this approach is still used today. Bekkhan Titiyev, son of the Chechen Memorial head Oyub Titiyev, was in 2018 accused on narcotics charges in what a Memorial staffer called 'a pretty unobvious attempt to put pressure on Titiyev'⁶¹ and his relatives forcibly expelled from their home.⁶²

However, the emphasis on collective punishment also means that the family of a target can be induced to cooperate with persecution or even initiate it. At present, this is especially the case for LGBT+ individuals, who face threats, attacks and even kidnapping by their families, who fear a loss of status or persecution themselves, if they cannot 'resolve' this issue.⁶³ The authorities even reportedly demand 'honour killings' for a family to clear its name.⁶⁴ Such collaboration was, for example, evident in the aforementioned Dudurkayeva and Akhmadov cases.

⁵⁹ The message on the social media site Telegram is at https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/375. For more on this case, see 'Первым же рейсом лети в Грозный: Кадыров заставил извиняться чеченца, который оскорбил подростков,' *InfoResist*, 11 October 2018 <<https://inforesist.org/ramzan-kadyirov-zastavil-izvinitnya-chechentsa-oskorblyavshego-podrostkov-novosti-mira/>> and 'Взбесившего Кадырова чеченца отправили работать дворником,' *InfoResist*, 12 October 2018 <<https://inforesist.org/vzbesivshego-kadyirova-chechentsa-otpravili-rabotat-dvornikom/>>

⁶⁰ 'Russia Shows What Happens When Terrorists' Families Are Targeted,' *New York Times*, 29 March 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/30/world/europe/russia-chechnya-caucasus-terrorists-families.html>>

⁶¹ 'Глава чеченского «Мемориала» рассказал об угрозах уголовного преследования его сына,' *Dozhd*, 12 January 2018 <https://tvrain.ru/news/glava_chechenskogo_memoriala_rasskazal_ob_ugrozah_ego_synu_ob_ugolovnom_presledovanii-454931/>; Email conversation with Memorial staffer, April 2018

⁶² 'Родственников Задержанного Чеченского Правозащитника Выгнали Из Дома Полицейские,' *TSN*, 11 January 2018 <<https://ru.tsn.ua/svit/rodstvennikov-zaderzhannogo-chechenskogo-pravozaschitnika-vygnali-iz-doma-policeyskie-1083120.html>>

⁶³ '«Это наш мужчина, наши дела, и мы сами разберемся», *Novaya gazeta*, 16 July 2018 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/07/16/77180-eto-nash-muzhchina-nashi-dela-i-my-sami-razberemsa>>

⁶⁴ 'Putin has given Chechnya free rein to persecute LGBTI people,' *Amnesty International*, 17 January 2019 <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/putin-has-given-chechnya-free-rein-to-persecute-lgbti-people/>>

The Chechen Diaspora

There is a widespread Chechen diaspora across the Russian Federation, the result of natural migration, flight from the two wars fought there since 1991, and legacies of past forced resettlements. To some, this represents an alternative instrument at Kadyrov's disposal.

Chechen Representative Offices

In common with many other constituent regions of the Russian Federation, the Chechen Republic maintains a network of 50 representative offices across the country, charged with working with local Chechen communities, encouraging inter-regional trade and similar activities.⁶⁵ However, these are typically small offices, more akin to honorary consuls than embassies, and cover at least one constituent republic or region, which may be the size of a European country. Although it is possible that if word of a particular individual came to the attention of the office, that it could pass the information back to Grozny, these cannot in any meaningful sense be considered a node for intelligence-gathering, let alone more direct action.

Chechen Communities

The Chechen community across Russia has played a role when Kadyrov wishes to bring direct pressure to bear on his higher-profile critics. When, for example, Krasnoyarsk city deputy Konstantin Senchenko publicly called Kadyrov a 'disgrace to Russia' in 2016 for his authoritarian language and ways, a delegation of local Chechens from the Vainakh association headed by freestyle wrestling champion Buvaysar Saytiyev (a Chechen honorary resident of the city) went to remonstrate with him. Senchenko subsequently offered a very public apology to Kadyrov.⁶⁶

Beyond this, though, there seems no evidence that they are some kind of fifth column for Grozny, although again it is fair to suggest that, again, it is possible that through gossip or more deliberate informing, news could travel back to Chechnya. The only real exceptions is Moscow, which has not only a relatively large Chechen community (the 2010 census recorded 14,524, but this is generally considered a major underestimate as it excludes short-term residents⁶⁷), but also disproportionate contacts with the mother country, thanks to strong political and commercial links and the presence of Chechen politicians and their security details, entourages and families. A Moscow police officer noted that 'there is little that happens in the Chechen community [in Moscow] and in their usual hangouts, that doesn't get chewed over, watched and reported.'⁶⁸ When asked if this meant reported back to Grozny, the officer concurred.

Chechen Criminals

The MVD staffer who said that 'no one trusts Kadyrov's people' added that, given how little cooperation it may expect from security structures outside Chechnya, 'it may be that Grozny uses alternative instruments,' hinting at the use of the notorious Chechen organised crime networks

⁶⁵ For a list of these offices, see the Ministry of the Chechen Republic on National Policy, External Relations, Press and Information website at <https://minnac-chr.ru/ministerstvo/adresa-i-telefonnyy-predstaviteley-glavy-chechenskoy-respubliki-v-subektakh-i-federalnykh-okrugakh-ros/>

⁶⁶ '«Товарищ, ты почему такие вещи пишешь?»', *Gazeta*, 15 January 2016 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2016/01/15_a_8023133.shtml>; 'Мужчины и не очень', *Novaya gazeta*, 18 January 2016 <<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/01/18/67078-muzhchiny-i-ne-ochen>>

⁶⁷ The full census data is available at Статистические сборники по итогам Всероссийской переписи населения 2010 года, from which the ethnic breakdown can be downloaded <http://moscow.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/moscow/ru/census_and_researching/census/national_census_2010/score_2010/score_2010_default>

⁶⁸ Conversation, Moscow, 2017

operating across the country.⁶⁹ It is undoubtedly the case that Chechen criminal networks are powerful, ruthless and extensive. However, beyond the apparent close ties between the Kadyrov regime and certain gangs operating in Moscow,⁷⁰ on the whole there appear to be few operational links. Most Chechen gangs detached themselves from their homeland during the Second Chechen War (1999-2009), not least when faced with Kremlin warnings that they would be treated mercilessly if there was any hint of cooperation with the rebels. Although the rebels have been defeated, there remains a distinct gap between the criminalised authorities in Chechnya itself, and their various corrupt and parasitic activities, and the wider network of the so-called Chechen *bratva*, 'brotherhood.' Neither Russian nor Western police or security sources could give me any concrete example of a case in which the latter assisted the former in tracking or persecuting individuals for political goals.

This is different when there is a real or alleged business interest at stake, such as ownership of assets or extortion framed as a 'debt.' In these cases, persecutors from Chechnya are much more likely to turn to Chechen organised crime groups elsewhere or even non-Chechen ones, typically offering a fee or a share in return for locating and possibly dealing with the targets. As a Moscow police officer with experience of dealing with Chechen officials and gangsters alike put it, 'honour is one thing, but a debt is a debt. If money is involved, then they will deal with whoever they need to, to get it.'⁷¹

The Geography of Threat

There are not enough cases available in both open source reporting and also through discussions with Russian interlocutors to be able to make a definitive statement about whether or not there is a pattern of 'dangerous' and 'safe' areas. However, one can reach some tentative conclusions.

More Dangerous

Moscow and St Petersburg are more 'dangerous' in that they tend to be more densely policed, their communications infrastructure is more up-to-date and the authorities more vigilant. With Moscow, for example, trialling new facial recognition systems linked to street cameras, high levels of FMS document controls, and routinely checking the registrations of cellphones entering the metro system, it is that much harder to stay 'below the radar.' I have personally witnessed the major police operations which often accompany the arrival of trains from Grozny to Moscow Paveletskii Station, which involve extensive document checks. As noted above, there is also an especially large Chechen community connected with the Kadyrov regime. Although, for example, some LGBT+ individuals who have fled Chechnya are being safehoused by the LGBT Network in Moscow, they are virtual prisoners there, and are hoping to find asylum abroad rather than expecting to be able to make new, open lives for themselves there.⁷² To a lesser extent, much of all this also applies to St Petersburg.

⁶⁹ Conversation, Moscow, 2014

⁷⁰ See, for example, 'Вооруженные «кадыровцы» в Москве как чеченский феномен', *Prestupnaya Rossiya*, 29 February 2016 <<https://crimerussia.com/gromkie-dela/vooruzhennyye-kadyrovtsy-v-moskve-kak-chechenskiy-fenomen/>>; '«Президент-отель», расписки и «главный чех». Почему чеченских полицейских, обвинявшихся в вымогательстве, осудили за самоуправство', *MediaZona*, 6 November 2018 <<https://zona.media/article/2018/11/06/president-hotel>>

⁷¹ Conversation, Moscow, 2017

⁷² 'For many gay men in conservative Chechnya, living in fear for their lives is commonplace,' *ABC News*, 20 July 2017 <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/gay-men-conservative-chechnya-living-fear-lives-commonplace/story?id=48726132>>; 'Activists say they are helping people flee new anti-gay purge in Chechnya', *ABC News*, 21 January 2019 <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/activists-helping-people-flee-anti-gay-purge-chechnya/story?id=60521006>>

Rural Russia is also, paradoxically, more 'dangerous' as outsiders stand out more, and prejudice towards so-called 'blacks' from the North Caucasus is more pronounced (especially if they are of non-traditional political or social orientation). A police officer from Vladivostok who had come from a small village in European Russia told me that 'if we saw someone from Central Asia or the North Caucasus come into town, before the day was up we'd have found an excuse to find out who they were and almost certainly have run their papers. Honestly, we'd be looking for an excuse to lock them up or move them on.'⁷³

The rest of the North Caucasus is more 'dangerous' to anyone accused of Wahhabist sympathies as these are regions in a state of low-level insurgency. The authorities are more likely to check the identity documents of strangers and more prone to detain now and ask questions later. The high levels of corruption in the region might seem to offer a counter factor, but it also tends to mean more aggressive and predatory behaviour by the police and other officials, who may also treat offering a bribe as a sign of guilt. There may also be a large Chechen community (especially a feature of Ingushetia and Dagestan). Furthermore, while most of Chechnya's neighbours fear and dislike Kadyrov, they are also often disinclined to challenge the Chechen security forces lest it trigger a heavy-handed response. When the Bakharchiyev family was forced to move to Ingushetia because their son Zelimkhan was accused of being a Wahhabist, they continued to receive threats, and the local authorities provided them with no protection.⁷⁴ (They ended up leaving for Europe.) Likewise, when Ramazan Dzhaldinov was targeted for intimidation for publicly criticising Kadyrov and his house was burnt down, he fled to Dagestan, but then was almost kidnapped when attending mosque.⁷⁵

Safer

The other cities of Russia are likely the 'safest' locations: large enough for newcomers not to stand out (and also with existing communities from the North Caucasus), yet typically less heavily policed. There are exceptions such as Rostov-on-Don (as it is the hub for operations in south-eastern Ukraine and thus heavily securitised), Kazan (which has heightened its security against Wahhabists since 2012 terrorist attacks and the 2016 trials which followed) and Stavropol (where there is an especially large local Chechen population again closely connected with Chechnya largely through legal and illegal trade), but in the main the consensus amongst Russian interlocutors is that these offer the best options for security and relative anonymity.

Conclusions

It is, of course, frustrating not to be able to offer a definitive answer to the question of whether those facing allegations of Wahhabist or terrorist sympathies of other real or imagined offences can find lasting and reliable security elsewhere in the Russian Federation

There is certainly a widespread assumption that persecution within Chechnya travels effortlessly throughout the Russian Federation. As 'Magomet', one of the victims of the current campaign against LGBT+ individuals now in a safe house elsewhere in the country said to Human Rights Watch, 'my life is ruined. I cannot go back. And it's not safe here either. They have long arms and

⁷³ Email conversation, 2018

⁷⁴ 'Guilty by blood,' *Meduza*, 31 October 2017 <<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2017/10/31/guilty-by-blood>>

⁷⁵ 'Chechnya: The power of public humiliation,' *Al-Jazeera*, 2 July 2016 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/06/chechnya-power-public-humiliation-160623111855166.html>>

they can find me and the others anywhere in Russia, just give them time...'⁷⁶ However, the truth of the matter seems rather more complex. What follows is by necessity a simplification, based on only a limited range of samples and subject to all kinds of case-by-case variations, but nonetheless it seems that there are four broad varieties of risk:⁷⁷

- ▶ ***Individuals who have been targeted personally by Kadyrov or another senior Chechen official***, whether through formal channels or not, can likely be considered at threat elsewhere in Russia and beyond its borders, at least until some resolution of the dispute is agreed. If located, they face a credible threat of violence, up to and including murder, and they are also likely to face formal charges. A case in point would that of Tumso Abdurakhmanov, whose case was mentioned above. Falling foul of Islam Kadyrov, who took his beard to be a sign of disloyalty and Wahhabist sympathies, he was forced to flee Chechnya, first to Georgia, and then to Poland. He faced claims in Chechnya that he had fought as a rebel in Syria, a Russian Federation national arrest notice, and then an Interpol Red Notice.⁷⁸
- ▶ ***Individuals who have been convicted of an offence or credibly believed to be a terrorist or an active supporter of terrorism*** can likely be presumed to be wanted throughout the Russian Federation. If located, they are likely to be detained and extradited to Chechnya. No open source accounts and no Russian interlocutors said that it was likely local authorities would challenge a lawful arrest order based on a court judgement.
- ▶ ***Individuals who have been officially charged with an offence but not convicted*** may be presumed to be wanted throughout the Russian Federation, but are unlikely to be the subject of an active search by either the Chechens or other Russian authorities unless the charge is serious enough to merit the attention of the FSB or Investigatory Committee. However, if and when they come to the attention of the authorities such as through passport checks or residence registration, they may either be detained or, at the very least, the authorities who have been looking for them will be alerted to their presence. If Grozny then seeks their detention and extradition back to Chechnya, this will generally be done.
- ▶ ***Individuals who have fallen foul of the Chechen authorities or groups and individuals working for them on an informal level*** face a much less clear threat. Depending on the nature of the dispute and the position of the persecutors, it is possible that they will be sought out, either for intimidation or violence, or for arrest. However, the consensus between sources and the evidence on the ground suggests this is unlikely, unless there is a substantial debt or other financial stake in play. Such individuals may well not be able to return to Chechnya safely unless and until the dispute is resolved, and their family and assets in Chechnya may be at risk. Beyond that, though, they are likely to be able to live unmolested unless they directly threaten or challenge their persecutors or otherwise press the issue, or unless their persecutors are willing and able to escalate to at least semi-official levels (such as by using the Chechen FSB office to place a watch notice on their

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch, "They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me", 26 May 2017 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/they-have-long-arms-and-they-can-find-me/anti-gay-purge-local-authorities-russias>>

⁷⁷ These projected outcomes are based on the cases available in both the open sources and my own experiences, and were also discussed with several interlocutors in Russia with inside knowledge, including an MVD official, a Moscow police officer, a Vladivostok police officer, an FMS official from Moscow, a crime correspondent for a national newspaper, and a worker for a human rights NGO.

⁷⁸ 'Lepiej, żeby zabili mnie w Polsce,' *Onet*, 24 October 2018 <<https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/czy-tumso-abdurachmanow-zostanie-odeslany-do-czeczenu/13whkhc>>

records). Of course, it is often difficult to be able to assess whether or not these circumstances are likely to arise.

The precise form of the threat also varies. Perversely, there could almost be said to be more of a risk of someone falling foul of the authorities in Chechnya being killed outside its borders than arrested. The reason for this is that while Kadyrov and his closest allies – and their agents – retain considerable license to kill, witnessed by the deaths of enemies both Chechen and other, the capacity of the rest of the republican security apparatus to pursue targets appears to depend heavily on cooperation from local and national bodies. They, in turn, are unwilling to be involved in private vendettas and largely will only act if there is a court judgement to enforce or an investigation backed by sufficient plausible evidence that local or national investigators consider it worthwhile. However, those targets who are not important enough to kill – or whose persecutors lack the ability or will to be able to reach out beyond Chechnya's borders – will likely face no more than threats and intimidation, especially through any family or friends still in Chechnya.