2 | *Copying and learning from outsiders? Assessing diffusion from transnational insurgents in the Chechen wars*

K R I S T I N   M .   B A K K E

Ever since September 11, 2001, Russian leaders have eagerly claimed that their struggle against rebel forces in the country's Chechen Republic is part of a global war on terror, linked to international terrorism. Similarly, in Moscow during summer 2005, a young Chechen man explained to me that the second war in Chechnya, which began in 1999, was caused by Moscow and Wahhabis – the name many Chechens use for people with a radical Islamist leaning – and was funded by Arab money.[1] These examples from Russia demonstrate that both state leaders and the man-in-the-street have come to emphasize the transnational influences on a struggle that started out largely as a domestic one. Indeed, in June 2010, the US Department of State (2010) noted that the activities of the Chechen insurgent leader Doku Umarov, "illustrate the global nature of the terrorist problem we fight today." Yet, while policy-makers, public debate, and a growing body of research have begun to call attention to such cross-border dimensions of intrastate struggles, few studies have examined the ways in which transnational insurgents matter, once they have entered a conflict.

The causes or catalysts for intrastate struggles sometimes rest abroad. Scholars have argued, for example, that neighboring states may become sanctuaries for rebel groups (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2007), that nationalist movements may learn or imitate movements elsewhere (Beissinger 2002), and that diaspora communities in either near or far-away countries sometimes fund and support rebellions back home (Adamson 2004; Lyons 2006; Smith and Stares 2007). What this research points to, is that intrastate struggles may not be so *intra*state after all, as domestic challengers to the state are helped or face pressures from abroad. In this chapter, I explore the domestic dynamics of the transnational relations of intrastate conflicts. I aim to explain *how* transnational insurgents influence the domestic challengers to the state.

---

[1] Personal communication, Moscow, June 2005.

Drawing on the literatures on intrastate conflicts, social movements, and transnationalism, I theorize the domestic processes that trans-national insurgents are likely to impact and the mechanisms through which they affect these processes.

I begin by briefly describing transnational insurgents. I then situate the study of transnational insurgents in the literature and present a theoretical framework for studying how they influence intrastate struggles. I organize the framework around the domestic insurgents' mobilization processes likely to be affected by transnational insurgents, emphasizing how information and resources may travel through different kinds of diffusion mechanisms. I test the argument through process tracing, in a study of the Chechen civil wars.

Transnational insurgents

Typically, the term "transnational" describes cross-border contacts and interactions that are not controlled by states but rather engage both state and non-state actors (Nye and Keohane 1971, 331). This study focuses on transnational insurgents in intrastate conflicts, by which I refer to armed non-state actors who, for either ideational or material reasons, choose to fight in an intrastate conflict outside their own home country, siding with the challenger to the state (Malet 2007). Transnational insurgents, who are also referred to as foreign fighters, exclude foreign legions and private security firms.

The most extensive data collection effort that traces the where-abouts of transnational insurgents is that of David Malet (2007; 2010; 2011), who shows that of 331 intrastate conflicts between 1816 and 2005, transnational insurgents were present in at least 70. While contemporary policy discussions emphasize so-called Islamist militants who travel from conflict to conflict (see Hegghammer 2010), transnational insurgents can also have ethnic ties or other ideological attachments to the domestic struggle. More than 40 percent of the conflicts featuring transnational insurgents began after the Cold War's demise, in Africa, the post-communist countries, Asia, and the Middle East. Historically, transnational insurgents have also participated – or still participate – in conflicts in the Americas (as in Colombia and Mexico) and Europe (for instance, Greece and Spain). Clearly, understanding the role of transnational insurgents in intras-tate conflicts is an important empirical question.

Transnationalism, social movements, and intrastate struggles

The finding that intrastate conflicts are not so intrastate after all fits into a long-standing but recently revived research program on transnational relations (see Checkel, this volume, for details). This literature has primarily focused on peaceful non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, international organizations, epistemic communities, and activist networks' effect on domestic politics (e.g. Nye and Keohane 1971; Haas 1992; Evangelista 1995; Risse-Kappen 1995b; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Checkel 1999; Tarrow 2005). Thus, the conflict literature's discovery that there are *violent* aspects to transnational relations is an important contribution.

The emerging literature on violent transnational relations, as well as the more long-standing literatures on peaceful transnational relations and social movements, has pointed to a number of variables that enable non-state actors, including transnational ones, to access or influence domestic politics. Beginning with the regional context, conflict-ridden neighborhoods may increase a state's chances of experiencing violent conflict (Gleditsch 2002; Salehyan 2007). Features of the state itself matter as well. In particular, so-called failed or weak states may attract actors with not-so-noble intentions (Rotberg 2004; Staniland 2005). Similarly, centralized political systems, where executive power is concentrated, may provide transnational actors with few access points to their target state, while states where power is dispersed may provide more access points for influence (Risse-Kappen 1995b). However, states that block domestic groups from exerting influence may inadvertently force these groups to seek allies outside the state, as such opening the door for transnational actors (Evangelista 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Pickvance 1999). Thus, transnational actors may have a harder *or* easier time gaining access to centralized and state-dominated polities than to states where societal groups flourish.

At the group-level, features of both the transnational and domestic non-state actors can affect whether outsiders enter and influence a domestic struggle. An outside group's access to policy-makers and resources will likely aid its impact (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tarrow 1998). Similarly, ethnic affinity or ideological bonds between foreign and domestic fighters – or the manipulation of such ties – can increase the chances of outsiders getting involved (Saideman 2002). The domestic fighters, for their part, can vary in the willingness

and ability to allow transnational actors access. Domestic rebels may be more willing to welcome the resources that outside insurgents bring when they face an unfavorable balance of power vis-à-vis the state.[2] Some domestic resistance movements may also be less able than others to keep foreign fighters out. In movements characterized by factional competition, the actors are not just fighting the state, but also one another, attempting to eliminate rivals (Pearlman 2009; Lawrence 2010; Cunningham et al. 2012). Transnational insurgents can help boost the resources needed to fight this dual struggle that each faction of the domestic movement is waging, and there are multiple entry points, or domestic allies, for the outsiders. Indeed, while a cohesive domestic movement may be willing to let outsiders in, it is also able to say no. A fragmented movement, in contrast, may be less able to control whether outsiders join its ranks. In the only study that systematically has begun to examine both when and how transnational insurgents matter, Staniland and Zukerman argue that both an unfavorable balance of power and a fragmented domestic movement are necessary conditions for the emergence of coalitions between domestic and foreign fighters.[3]

While existing work points to a number of conditions that may enable transnational insurgents to enter domestic struggles, less work has focused on the ways in which these actors influence domestic politics. As Checkel notes in the introduction to this volume, the goal in statistical studies of the transnational aspects of civil war is typically to examine whether – to take one example – location in a conflict-ridden neighborhood leads to violent conflict; however, such correlational analysis masks the mechanisms at work.

Diffusion from transnational to domestic insurgents

My focus in this study is the mechanisms that link the presence of transnational insurgents to violent conflict. Consistent with Staniland and Zukerman,[4] I propose that to understand how these outside actors affect intrastate struggles, one must begin by considering what it is

---

[2] Paul Staniland and Sarah Zukerman. "The Effects of Foreign Fighters on Civil Wars: War Fighting, Ideas, and Recruitment." Unpublished paper, Department of Political Science and Security Studies Program, MIT. 2007. They argue that foreign fighters may lead to changes in the domestic rebels' ideational motivation, non fighting capacity, and recruitment.

[3] Ibid.   [4] Ibid.

about the domestic challengers that outsiders can shape. Research on social movements suggests there are three aspects of the domestic movement that may change as a result of interaction with or pressure from an outside group – its goals, its repertoire of forms of (collective) action, and its resources. In military terms, we can think of these as strategy, tactics, and logistics. They are features that matter for the domestic movement's ability to fight the state, either by affecting the movement's legitimacy and support in the eyes of the population in whose name it is fighting, or by affecting its capacity and competence to organize collectively and confront the state. Indeed, they are closely linked to key processes in a movement's mobilization: framing of goals, tactical innovation, and resource mobilization (see also Schmitz, this volume; Adamson, this volume). The transnational actors can affect shifts in these processes through mechanisms such as *mediated* and *relational diffusion*, in turn enabling *learning* and *emulation*.

In studies of contentious politics, the term 'diffusion' is often used to describe how social movements may spread from one locality to another (e.g. Beissinger 2002). However, and as Checkel argues in Chapter 1, it may be useful to think about diffusion as a process consisting of a number of smaller mechanisms. Initially, there is the mechanism that enables the spread of information or resources, which can take place through relational, non-relational, or mediated diffusion (Tarrow 2005, building on Sageman 2004). Relational diffusion is about the transfer of information or resources through personal networks and social bonds. It includes interpersonal interactions. Non-relational diffusion is about the transmissions between people or groups with no direct ties or social bonds, where people in one locale learn from people elsewhere through television, the radio, newspapers, and the internet. Here, I will not emphasize non-relational diffusion, as my starting point is the presence of transnational actors. Finally, mediated diffusion takes place when a third party brings two previously unconnected parties together – or at least brings together information or resources from two previously unconnected parties. Mediated diffusion is also called brokerage, as the third party functions as a broker that brings seller and buyer together. The parties that are brought together can be communities or movements, even individuals, and the broker is typically an individual or group of individuals who may set up institutions. Through either diffusion route – relational or mediated – learning or emulation on the part of the domestic insurgents can be based on ideational or instrumental motives.

Yet transmission of information or resources through these initial diffusion mechanisms does not necessarily mean that they have any effect. The effect would depend on subsequent mechanisms – whether the new ideas resonate with the local population (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Checkel 1999), and whether people actually adopt or adapt to the new ideas or use of new resources (Acharya 2004). If transnational insurgents provoke a change in framing or tactics, one might expect a counter-reaction from the local population, pending on whether the new frame or new tactics match local views on what is acceptable and useful. The counter-reaction can deepen existing cleavages within the domestic movement, even bringing about new divisions. How such counter-reactions occur is a separate research question.[5] The important point here is that the initial diffusion mechanisms can ultimately have either helpful or harmful effects on the domestic movement's mobilization – or no effect at all.

Shifts in framing

The social movement literature has long emphasized framing as a process that affects a movement's ability to mobilize supporters. Framing implies that the actors define what they are fighting for and who they are fighting against, often in binary us-versus-them terms. It includes mechanisms such as the attribution of threat or, in more clinical terms, diagnosis of the ills that need to be cured and prognosis for the solution, including the (re)stating and (re)imagining of a legitimate purpose (Snow and Benford 1992; Benford 1993; McAdam et al. 2001, 48).

Transnational insurgents can contribute to shifts in the domestic movement's framing through both mediated and relational diffusion mechanisms that may engender learning or emulation of new frames. Staniland and Zukerman suggest two routes that correspond to these types of diffusion: in the long-run, transnational insurgents can set up schools or other institutions, such as mosques, that transmit their ideologies to (future) domestic fighters through learning, even

---

[5] Kristin M. Bakke. "Acceptance and Resistance to Foreign Ideas: Transnational Insurgents' Impact on the Chechen Separatists." Unpublished manuscript. Department of Political Science, University College London. 2010.

indoctrination.[6] In the short-term, the domestic fighters' personal contact with the transnational insurgents can cause a more direct shift in goals, especially if the transnational insurgents are successful or possess charismatic leadership, and if the bond that develops is a close one.

In both routes, the mechanism is about diffusion through learning or emulation. The diffusion described in the long-term route is mediated diffusion, or brokerage, where a third party brings together previously unconnected actors (Tarrow 2005, 104). The more direct diffusion described in the short-term route is relational diffusion, where learning or emulation results from interpersonal interaction. Studying recruitment into cults and sects, Stark and Bainbridge note that strong personal bonds mean that, "[r]ather than being drawn to the group because of the appeal of its ideology, people were drawn to the ideology because of their ties to the group" (1980, 1379). Learning or emulation on the part of the (future) domestic insurgents can be either ideationally or instrumentally motivated. They may believe in the new framing, or they may decide to adopt or adapt to this framing if it is effective at garnering support or resources.

While it may be impossible to empirically establish whether cognitive mechanisms such as learning or emulation take place, we can observe the first and last steps of diffusion (but see Nome and Weidmann, this volume). We can observe whether people are connected either directly or indirectly through a third party, and we can observe the consequences of diffusion, namely a shift in framing. Hence, if transnational insurgents affect shifts in a domestic movement's frame, we would see a change in framing taking place *after* the transnational insurgents enter the struggle – timing is key here. If the mechanism is about mediated diffusion and long-term learning or emulation, we would observe the establishment of institutions, schools for example, preceding the shift in framing. While it is more difficult to establish the presence of relational diffusion, accounts of heroic individuals among the transnational insurgents, followed by a shift in the domestic movement's framing, would suggest that such a mechanism is at work. Importantly, we should also consider alternative reasons for a shift in framing, as the change may be homegrown rather than imported.

[6] Paul Staniland and Sarah Zukerman. "The Effects of Foreign Fighters on Civil Wars: War Fighting, Ideas, and Recruitment." Unpublished paper, Department of Political Science and Security Studies Program, MIT. 2007. 7 8.

To the degree that these diffusion mechanisms cause a shift in the domestic movement's framing of the struggle, we should carefully consider the effects on public support. If the new framing resonates with the local population, we may observe that initially hesitant factions of the domestic movement adopt the new framing as a means to ensure public support. Yet the transnational insurgents may fail to strengthen the domestic movement if they foster a new framing of the struggle that fails to resonate with the locals.

Tactical innovation

Just like framing is key to a movement's ability to mobilize supporters and fight the state, so is its repertoire of forms of (collective) action – its repertoire of tactics. Tactical innovation refers to a movement's creation of new tactical forms (McAdam 1983, 736). A long-standing claim in the social movement literature says that movements adopting non-institutionalized or radical forms of contention are more likely to have an impact than movements that operate within the bounds of "normal" politics (Gamson 1975; Piven and Cloward 1979). Yet it is also plausible that movements that adhere to the norms of "normal" politics are the ones most likely to have an impact. A movement's turn to violence, for instance, may backfire if that strategy alienates the very population whose support it needs.

Setting aside the question of whether radical forms of contention help or hurt a movement's ability to fight the state, the question here is how transnational insurgents may affect a domestic movement's tactical innovation. In particular, I want to explore their effect on a movement's use of radical tactics. By radical tactics, I refer to tactics that the international community considers inappropriate wartime conduct, including the intentional killing of civilians, torture, hostage-taking, and extrajudicial executions. Do transnational insurgents encourage tactical innovation among the domestic fighters, towards explicitly targeting non-combatants and resorting to hostage-taking and torture?

Similar diffusion mechanisms as those affecting framing can influence tactical innovation. Mediated diffusion, or brokerage, through institutions or third parties can foster learning or emulation of new ideas about morally accepted or effective and efficient tactics. Relational diffusion through one-on-one interactions with the transnational insurgents, either by fighting side-by-side or in training camps, can engender

learning or emulation of new tactics, especially if those tactics have proven successful elsewhere and do not contradict local norms for acceptable behavior. As for observable implications, we would have to carefully examine whether the transnational insurgents do indeed advocate or use radical tactics, as well as whether tactical innovation in the domestic movement, towards more radical tactics, takes place *after* the transnational insurgents enter the struggle, keeping in mind that, alternatively, the sources for innovation may come from within (Giugni 1999).

Again, we should not assume that tactical innovation enhances the domestic movement's ability to fight the state. Tactical innovation can backfire if it fails to resonate with local norms for appropriate behavior or local assessments of useful tactics.

Resource mobilization

Perhaps the most common assumption about the traits of a resistance movement that matter for its ability to fight the state is the movement's material resources – its ability to mobilize resources and use these resources to mobilize people (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resources include fighters, weapons, communication, know-how, and finance. In the literature on revolutions, scholars have long pointed to the importance of overcoming the collective action problem (Popkin 1988; Lichbach 1994). It is reasonable to expect more resource-rich movements to be better able to distribute selective incentives that can lure participants to engage in collective action, even risk their lives, than resource-poor movements that can offer few, if any, rewards. Besides helping prevent free-riding, resources, especially coercive resources such as fighters and weapons (and knowing how to use those weapons skillfully), are critical in and of themselves: the more coercive resources the movement possesses, the better able it is to fight the state.

To the degree that transnational insurgents join forces with the domestic fighters, they may bring fighters and weapons – or funds to buy those – that increase the coercive strength of the domestic movement. That is, they may directly transmit resources to the domestic insurgents by bringing competence and capacity. If they do, we should be able to observe an increase in resources following the entry of the transnational insurgents. More indirectly, through mediated diffusion or brokerage, transnational insurgents can link the domestic

movement with funding sources elsewhere, as such contributing to the movement's resource mobilization. While it is unlikely that we can observe the movement's cash flow by examining its budget, the evidence for this latter mechanism could be in the form of expert assessments of a movement's funding or statements from the domestic fighters. Again, a consideration of timing would be key to determine whether the link to funding outside the country is established only after the transnational insurgents enter the stage.

Unlike transnational insurgents' effects on goals and tactics, their effect on resources is in the short-run likely to go just one way: the more resources transnational insurgents bring, the better able the domestic challengers are to fight the state. However, if the domestic movement becomes dependent on external sources of funding, the long-run consequences can be dire if the funding sources dry up. Akin to arguments about foreign aid stifling local initiative in developing countries, the long-run consequence of external sources of funding is potentially a vulnerable or dependent domestic movement.

In sum, assessing the role of transnational insurgents requires establishing the following about the domestic movement: Do we observe a change in framing of its goals? Does it adopt new tactics and carry out operations that were previously taboo? Do the local fighters have more resources or carry out operations for which they previously lacked the resources? If we do observe these changes, we can not conclude that they are caused by transnational insurgents until we have traced the changes back to mediated or relational diffusion from these outsiders, as well as considered alternative domestic reasons for change.

Research design

The research task in this study requires a process-tracing approach (Checkel, this volume; George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007a). As I am interested in tracing the mechanisms that create variation across three processes of domestic mobilization – framing, tactical innovation, resource mobilization – the case selection must allow for such variation (on the dependent variables). To that end, I examine Chechnya's conflict with the Russian federal government over time, which offers shifts in each mobilization process. The conflict started with the Chechen declaration of independence in 1991, turned into a war in 1994, came to an end with a ceasefire in 1996, again turned

violent in 1999, and today has come to an uneasy stalemate, with violence dwindling since 2005.

In terms of framing, the Chechen conflict began as a nationalist struggle much like the rest of the "parade of sovereignties" in Russia in the early 1990s. It remained so throughout the first war, focusing on independence for the Chechen republic. Since the period between the first and second wars, Chechen leaders increasingly made references to the establishment of an Islamic state. In recent years, some Chechen resistance leaders have framed the struggle in terms of nationalism and self-determination, while the movement's dominant branch is fighting an Islamist struggle aimed at creating an Islamic emirate.

As for tactical innovation, one of the infamous characteristics of the second Chechen war was a growing kidnapping-for-ransom industry, which did not to a similar extent characterize the insurgents' tactics in the first war – although both the Chechens and the Russians were known to have carried out kidnappings even in the first war. Another infamous characteristic associated more with the second war than the first was large-scale terrorist attacks outside Chechnya's borders, such as the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost theater siege in Moscow in 2002 and the Beslan school siege in 2004 – although again, attacks had taken place in 1994–1996. Moreover, in 2000 suicide terrorism became a new tool in the Chechen insurgents' repertoire of tactics. These trends suggest that the tactics of the Chechen resistance movement have changed over time, turning more radical in the sense that also civilians have become explicit targets of violence.

In terms of the ability to mobilize resources and muster coercive strength, the Chechen struggle has also changed over time. In the immediate post-Soviet era, the Chechen separatist government inherited weapons from the branch of the Soviet army that had been stationed in Chechnya and received funding primarily from the Chechen community in Russia. In the second war, the Chechens turned to home-made weapons, but they reportedly used them with great skill (Dudayev 2004). Due to the destruction of the first war, the relative popularity of Putin's war on Chechnya within Russia, and the fact that the resistance leaders from 2000 onwards did not officially head their republic (as Putin put Chechnya under central control), the Chechen fighters had fewer domestic resources available than in the first war. Reports indicate, however, that resources from outside increased.

To assess if and how transnational insurgents have affected these mobilization processes, I consult a variety of sources, including personal communication with Chechens living in Moscow; the documentary/ propaganda film *The Life and Times of Khattab*, which contains interviews and footage of the most important transnational insurgent in Chechnya (Waislamah News Network 2002);[7] the Islamist website Kavkaz Center; the separatist website Chechenpress; monitoring of local Chechen papers by the Russian International Institute for Humanities and Political Studies (IGPI); journalistic accounts through the Jamestown Foundation (*Chechnya Weekly*, *Terrorism Monitor*, *North Caucasus Analysis, Prism*), which is an independent institute with extensive coverage of the North Caucasus; reports from the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (*Caucasus Reporting Service*); news searches via Lexis-Nexis; and academic and biographical articles and books.

Transnational insurgents in the Chechen wars

While it is impossible to get precise data on the number of transnational insurgents in Chechnya at any given point – and the Russian authorities may have sought to inflate the numbers – it has been suggested that over the course of the two wars, 500–700 transnational insurgents, including members of the diaspora, have fought there (Moore 2007). A total of 500–700 indicates an increase over time, from the 80–90 who were reported to be active in the first war. Some estimate there were 100–200 transnational insurgents present during the second war (B. Williams 2005b), which would suggest that the highest number of transnational insurgents entered in the interwar period and early years of the second war. The first transnational insurgents came to Chechnya in February 1995, just a couple of months into the first war, as followers of the fighter known as Emir Khattab or Ibn Al-Khattab (Gall and de Waal 1998, 308; Tishkov 2004, 172; Gammer 2006, 214–215). Of Saudi Arabian or Jordanian origin, Khattab fought in the civil wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan before entering Chechnya in 1995, upon the invitation of a member of the Jordanian Chechen diaspora community known as Sheikh Ali

---

[7] It is a 2002 Arabic language production (with English subtitles) that portrays Khattab as a war hero, giving it a propaganda feel, using interviews and footage of Khattab. Produced after Khattab's death, the film is a collage of earlier footage. It is presented by Waislamah News Network as Series 1 of Contemporary Heroes of Islam.

Fathi al-Shishani, who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan and had moved to Chechnya in 1993 (Moore and Tumelty 2009, 84). According to some accounts, Khattab brought with him a unit of eight Afghan-Arab fighters. In his own words in *The Life and Times of Khattab*, Khattab says he entered Chechnya with 12 "brothers" from Dagestan, then meeting "other groups," although it is not clear who these other groups were. Tumelty (Moore and Tumelty 2009) reports that after Khattab's arrival in Chechnya, he met with Fathi, who had recruited some 90 Arab fighters from Afghanistan, of which 60 joined Khattab. The transnational insurgents active in Chechnya have primarily been from the Middle East, but some have also come from North Africa, Turkey, and possibly Pakistan. The question here is if and how these transnational actors over time have affected the Chechen resistance movement's framing of goals, tactical innovation, and resource mobilization.

Effect on framing

The Chechen insurgency grew out of the Chechen nationalist movement that emerged in the final days of the Soviet Union. In fall 1991, under the leadership of Dzhokhar Dudayev, a Chechen who had served as a Soviet Air Force general, the nationalists overthrew the local communist-led local government and declared the republic independent.

Leading up to and during the first war, the nationalists framed the struggle around an image of an aggressive and exploitative state that consistently had imposed suffering on them (Radnitz 2006). Dudayev proclaimed in a 1991 interview that, "I will restore my people's pride after our enslavement by the Russians" (Sheehy 1991, 26).[8] This sentiment echoed many Chechens' collective memory, which was – and still is – colored by Stalin's deportation of nearly the entire Chechen population from its homeland between 1944 and 1957 (B. Williams 2000; Tishkov 2004, 50–54; Ustinova 2004). To many Chechens, the deportation is part of a repeated history of repression. In 2005, a Chechen man explained to me that the heart of the Chechen question is that with regular intervals, Russia has occupied Chechnya. The tsarist forces did it, then the Bolsheviks, Stalin, and now the current post-Soviet regime.[9] Such views were not uncommon in the early 1990s, and Tishkov (2004, 53)

[8] See also "Interview with Jokhar Dudayev by Peter Collins, Voice of America," *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, December 11, 1995.
[9] Personal communication, Moscow, June 2005.

argues that Chechens increasingly believed that self-determination was necessary to halt long-time discrimination.

Dudayev was not opposed to Islam, and he was more open to the teaching of Islam than his Soviet predecessors; he even used traditional Sufi Islamic references to mobilize people. The State Islamic Institute in Grozny (the Chechen capital), which received funding both from Dudayev's government and Saudi Arabian and Islamic International foundations, opened in 1991 (Bobrovnikov 2001, 13). This nod to Islam must be seen in light of Dudayev coming to power in the early post-Soviet period, when the Chechens were happy to again freely practice their religion, long oppressed. Yet Dudayev openly favored a secular state (Tishkov 2004, 169). He formed a commission to consider Islamic sharia courts, but the legal system remained secular until after he was killed in 1996 (Muzaev 1997). Indeed, while there were voices calling for an Islamic state in the early 1990s (German 2003, 31; Moore and Tumelty 2009, 83), the Chechens' initial quest for independence had little to do with religion.

This changed when Dudayev was killed by Russian forces in April 1996. His immediate successor, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, had ever since the founding of the nationalist movement favored an independent and Islamic Chechen state (Dunlop 1998, 93). In his brief period in power, Yandarbiyev called for the introduction of sharia criminal code (Powell 1996).[10] When asked in an interview whether it would be natural for Chechens to live under sharia law, Yandarbiyev responded that, "We are fighting to protect our independence and to defend the honor and dignity of the free people under the banner of Islam."[11] The struggle was focused on Chechnya, blending nationalism and Islamism:

Our *jihad* is first of all a *jihad* to defend the territory, honor and dignity of the Chechen people. But a *jihad* is not only a war conducted with arms in hand. It is a struggle against everything that contradicts what has been established by the Single God, that is against everything that a Muslim is forbidden by God. In this sense, of course, the *jihad* knows no concrete forms or borders.[12]

---

[10] See also "Guard to be set up in Chechnya to Supervise Implementation of Sharia Law," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*ITAR TASS*), October 17, 1996.
[11] "Chechen Separatist Leader Yandarbiyev Thinks Peace Process Will Continue," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*NTV*), October 23, 1996.
[12] Quoted in "Interview Granted by Chechen Republic President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev," *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast* (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*), December 20, 1996.

Among Yandarbiyev's three most serious contenders in the 1997 presidential elections in the republic, all made reference to Islam but to varying degrees (Radnitz 2006). Aslan Maskhadov, the field commander who had negotiated the 1996 peace agreement with Moscow, advocated a secular state, yet viewed Chechnya's Islamic customs favorably.[13] Shamil Basayev, a prominent field commander, called for an uncompromising attitude to Chechen independence and adherence to Islam, but fell short of advocating an Islamic state.[14] The third candidate, Movladi Udugov, who had served in both Dudayev and Yandarbiyev's governments, favored an independent Islamic state. In the elections, Maskhadov emerged as the clear victor, suggesting a popular rejection of the most radical religious agenda.

Over time, the struggle has taken on much more of a religious tone, departing from a Chechen-centered one. This development appears to have taken off in the interwar years, and the second war was, in contrast to the first war, one where Islamist (Salafi) goals played a significant role. President Maskhadov was killed in 2005, and both of his successors, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev, who was killed after only a year in power, and Doku Umarov, have framed the struggle in more Islamist terms. While Sadulayev's framing of the struggle contained elements of both nationalism and Islamism,[15] Umarov's framing is more clearly Islamist. In the fall of 2007, Umarov proclaimed that his struggle was in the name of a unified Caucasus Emirate, not just self-determination for any one ethnic group:

I am announcing to all Muslims that I am at war against the infidels under the banner of Allah. This means that I, Amir of the Caucasian Mujahideen, reject all infidel laws that have been established in this world. I reject all laws and systems that the infidels have established on the land of the Caucasus.

---

[13] "Separatist Leader Maskhadov against Creation of Islamic State," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*ITAR TASS*), September 17, 1996; "Separatist Commander Maskhadov Interviewed on Talks with Russia, Fundamentalism," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*Tyden*), October 3, 1996.

[14] "Chechen Separatist Chief Admits Arab Involvement in Conflict in North Caucasus," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*ITAR TASS*), November 4, 1996; "Interview Granted by Shamil Basayev, a Candidate for the Chechen Presidency," *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, December 16, 1996.

[15] "Russia's Tactics Make Chechen War Spread across Caucasus — Rebel President," *BBC Monitoring* (*Chechenpress*), September 13, 2005. See also the Jamestown Foundation interview published after Sadulayev was killed, published in *Chechnya Weekly*, July 6, 2006.

I reject and outlaw all names that the infidels use to split the Muslims.
I outlaw all ethnic, territorial and colonial zones named 'North-Caucasian
republics', etc … We renounce all these names (quoted in Smirnov 2007b).

Indeed, Umarov, who fought in both wars and was a member of
Maskhadov's government, has stated that, "Mujahideen in the Cau-
casus do not fight for democracy, they fight for Sharia" (Smirnov
2007d). From considering himself the president of Chechnya (a position
not officially endorsed as the post is held by the pro-Moscow Ramzan
Kadyrov), he has moved to consider himself the emir of the North
Caucasus Emirate. This framing of the Chechen struggle as a religiously
motivated quest aimed at establishing a larger Islamic state differs from
the nationalist framing leading up to the first Chechen war.

   The question here is whether the change in the Chechen separatist
movement's framing can be traced to transnational insurgents. The
empirics suggest yes. Transnational insurgents influenced the framing
of the movement's goal primarily through Khattab and his initially small
group of fighters, who were dedicated to a social and political Islamic
order (Wilhelmsen 2004; Gammer 2005; Speckhard and Ahkmedova
2006; Moore and Tumelty 2008, 2009; Sokirianskaia 2010). Indeed, to
Khattab, who had fought in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the
Chechen struggle was yet another piece in a wider Muslim struggle.
Timing-wise, while Dudayev also embraced some Islamic teaching and
practices, the shift in framing towards a jihadist struggle, particularly
visible in field commander Basayev's framing, followed the entry of
transnational insurgents with an Islamist agenda. This change happened
through both mediated and relational diffusion.

   Initially, Sheikh Fathi functioned as a broker who brought Khattab
to Chechnya, thus connecting Chechen insurgents with fighters from
the Middle East and elsewhere in the region. This is mediated diffusion:
a third party established links between previously unconnected parties.
Yet the degree to which the Chechen fighters were unconnected to
insurgents abroad should not be overstated. Already in 1994, Basayev
had taken 30 of his fighters to a military training camp in Afghanistan
(B. Williams 2003; Hughes 2007, 101–102). Moreover, in 1992,
Basayev had played a critical role assisting the self-determination
movement in Abkhazia in its armed struggle against the Georgian
state. Thus, even without Fathi, the Chechens had established links
to foreign insurgents and insurgencies.

Once in Chechnya, the route through which information was transmitted from Khattab and his followers to the Chechen insurgents was both relational and mediated. Khattab initially set up military training camps in 1995, and in 1996, he established a training center, Kavkaz, consisting of several camps for both military and religious instruction near the village of Serzhen'-Yurt in the mountainous eastern part of the republic (B. Williams 2005a; Moore and Tumelty 2008).[16] *The Life and Times of Khattab* shows footage of Khattab in Chechnya, his voiceover recounting how he entered the republic and started training his "brothers." The camps included training on religion, mine cleaning, land mining, and the use of weapons. The students, mainly young men, were primarily Chechens but also Dagestanis, Arabs, and Muslims from elsewhere in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. According to one account, they were paid to attend (Baiev 2003, 206). The teachers were primarily foreigners speaking Arabic, helped by translators from Dagestan (Sokirianskaia 2010, 212). Hundreds of young people passed through this training center, and many went on to become fighters in the Chechen resistance in the second war (Sokirianskaia 2010, 212; Moore and Tumelty 2009, 85). In terms of mechanisms, these training camps were sites for both relational diffusion – through direct hands-on training by transnational insurgents – and mediated diffusion – to the degree that non-insurgent teachers introduced their students to new ideas.

Khattab's increasingly close relationship to the field commander Basayev, who allegedly in spring 1998 appointed Khattab his foreign security advisor,[17] is also an example of relational diffusion. Indeed, in his online memoir *Book of a Mujahiddeen* [*sic*], written in 2004, Basayev specifically mentions Khattab's lesson on strategies and tactics of war.[18] In 1998, Khattab and Basayev jointly organized the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade, which consisted of Chechen and foreign fighters from the Middle East and North Africa (Wilhelmsen

---

[16] Vidino (2005) notes that many reports of training camps come from Russian intelligence sources and Islamist propaganda videos, but Sokirianskaia's (2010) ethnographic study includes interviews with Chechens who passed through these camps, providing confidence in the camps' whereabouts and programs.

[17] Sanobar Shermatova, "'I Feel Secure When I Have Ammunition at Hand'," *Moscow News*, April 16, 1998.

[18] I was made aware of this e memoir, which I located by searching online, by King (2008, 241). The online location of this publication changes over time. It was last accessed at www.tawhed.net/dl.php?i=0512091i (August 15, 2012).

2004, 34). The two were responsible for the event that triggered the second war with Russia, the attack into neighboring Dagestan in August 1999. Unsanctioned by President Maskhadov, the attack was aimed at creating an Islamic Republic of Chechnya and Dagestan with the help of Dagestani Islamist militants.

While it is true Basayev had led an attack into neighboring Dagestan in June 1995 – taking more than a thousand civilians hostage at a hospital in Budennovsk – that incident was framed as a response to the Russian forces' violent campaign in Chechnya. "Our aim was to reach Moscow … and our purpose is to stop this war," he argued.[19] It was an attack motivated by revenge and Chechen independence. In contrast, in the 1999 attack into Dagestan, Basayev framed it as a struggle aimed at driving the Russian "infidels" out of the North Caucasus region: "Today there is a great deal of work for brother Muslims from all over the world … we will fight until the full victory of Islam in the world."[20] These words echoed those of Khattab, who never had seen Chechnya as an isolated struggle. In a 1997 interview, for instance, Khattab said that, "We are preparing ourselves for other *jihad* (holy war) operations in Chechnya or elsewhere."[21] Basayev's shift in framing, towards a larger Islamist struggle, followed Khattab's entry into Chechnya.

Basayev's 1999 attack into Dagestan, which was the manifestation of a shift in framing, was also apparently influenced by the Dagestani Wahhabi preacher Bagaudin Kebedov, who had fled the crackdown on radical Islamists in his own republic and entered Chechnya in December 1997 (Muzaev 1998e; 1999b; 1999d). Prior to the August 1999 invasion, he asked Basayev to assist him in overthrowing Dagestan's pro-Russian rulers and establish an Islamic Republic (Vatchagaev

---

[19] Quoted in "Rebels Execute Russian Captives," *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), June 16, 1995. See also David Zucchino, "War Stories from Rebel on the Run: Raid Was a Wake up Call for Russians, Chechen Explain," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 16, 1995.

[20] Quoted in Ruslan Musayev, "Prominent Chechen Warlords Lead Rebels in Fighting Russian Troops," *Associated Press Worldstream*, August 11, 1999; see also "Chechen Says He Leads Revolt in Nearby Area," *New York Times*, August 12, 1999.

[21] Quoted in "Mujahedeen Leader Says Chechnya Still Faces Russian Danger," *Agence France Presse*, May 17, 1997. See also interview in Sanobar Shermatova, "'I Feel Secure When I Have Ammunition at Hand'," *Moscow News*, April 16, 1998.

2007). Yet while it looks like Kebedov may have played a role in influencing Basayev's 1999 Dagestan attack, the timing suggests that Kebedov followed, rather than fostered, a shift in framing. He did not enter Chechnya until late 1997, for the very reason that the increasingly pro-Islamist environment in Chechnya was more suitable for his preachings than the environment in Dagestan.

Diffusion may also have taken place via the more long-term mediated type, in particular, through schools and mosques that introduced young people to new ideas. From 1996–97, Salafi mosques and schools were opened in Grozny and rural regions of the republic, sometimes with financial rewards to the regions that adhered to this new and non-indigenous version of Islam (Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006, 16). In *The Life and Times of Khattab*, Khattab recounts how these religious institutions had structured programs, with training for memorizing the Koran and courses for giving *dawah* (spreading the message of Islam), organized from basic to advanced levels. The best source of information for whether this kind of diffusion had lasting effects is Ekaterina Sokirianskaia's (2010) extraordinary Ph.D. dissertation on state-building in Chechnya and Ingushetia, based on years of fieldwork. Her assessment is that, while some of the leaders in the insurgent movement may have turned to Islam for instrumental reasons, "for young people who followed these opposition leaders, who went through the training camps of Khattab, Islamism was already in earnest" (2010, 216).

This turn towards Islam at the societal level made it difficult for the government under President Maskhadov not to turn to it as well. While not a proponent of an Islamic state and religious courts, Maskhadov was gradually compelled to establish sharia courts and implement Islamic rules across the republic (Muzaev 1998a; 1998c; 1998d; 1998e; 1999c), and in February 1999 he implemented full sharia law (ibid. 1999a). It is plausible to reason that because Maskhadov's turn towards Islam followed the establishment of Salafi schools and mosques, he may have found that a more religious message was key to keeping the support of his constituents – who may have attended these schools or mosques – and who looked favorably upon the Wahhabis who had come to join the Chechens' struggle (Gammer 2005). In other words, it was an instrumental attempt at co-optation.

Indeed, the motivation for turning towards a more Islamist struggle appears to have been driven both by instrumental and ideational motives. Because there were sometimes financial rewards attached to

turning towards the new branch of Islam that the outsiders brought along, including access to financial patronage abroad (e.g. Moore and Tumelty 2008, 419), one cannot claim that diffusion necessarily took place through learning or genuine adoption of these ideas; it may rather have been emulation in response to these rewards. In a 2003 interview, the Chechen commander known as Amir Ramzan, who admitted to receiving financial support from the transnational insurgent Abu Walid al-Ghamdi, said the following when asked if his foreign patrons expected anything in return: "The most important thing for them is that the money is used for the war, for the *jihad*, and that those who receive it are true Muslims."[22] Similarly, Sokirianskaia quotes Yandarbiyev: "Islamic fundamentalism is not dangerous. It is partnership, international relations. You do not consider it a problem if Western investors tour Russia, do you? One cannot divide help into help from Wahhabis and help from others" (quoted in Sokirianskaia 2010, 215). This comparison of Islamic fundamentalism to investors suggests that instrumental motives cannot be ruled out.

While the struggle over time has come to include more references to Islam and establishing an Islamic state, it is not exclusively an Islamist struggle. Even Basayev, who was killed by Russian security forces in summer 2006, stated in a 2005 interview with the Russian journalist Andrei Babitsky, broadcast on ABC Nightline, that religion was not as important as national liberation: "I need guarantees that tomorrow future Chechen generations won't be deported to Siberia, like they were in 1944. That's why we need independence."[23] A few months later, though, in February 2006, a more Islamist frame dominated: "Today, before every Muslim is the duty to take the path of *jihad* and fulfill the command of Allah" (quoted in Jamestown Foundation 2006). Internal communication between Basayev and his soldiers suggest that he, indeed, was motivated by religion. Yet in public statements that could reach a Western audience, he may have been more reluctant to say so (Radnitz 2006, 249), again suggesting that instrumental concerns were key to the framing of the struggle.

Although the framing of the struggle today is more colored by references to an Islamic state, sharia law, and the unity of Muslims in

---

[22] "Next Year the War Will Seize the Entire Caucasus," Kavkaz Center, November 28, 2003. Available from www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2003/11/28/2039.shtml (accessed June 7, 2011).

[23] *ABC News Nightline*, July 28, 2005.

the North Caucasus than in the first war, it also encompasses the rhetoric of self-determination. While the Chechen resistance movement until 2007 had one overarching leader, it is now divided between the nationalist branch, headed by the UK-based Akhmed Zakayev, who served as foreign minister under Maskhadov and is now the self-proclaimed prime minister of the Chechen government in exile, and the Islamist branch under Umarov. So far, this division has primarily played out as a war of words, but Chechnya's trajectory in the interwar period, when the Islamist framing took root, suggests that divisions within the movement can be detrimental. Indeed, the Chechens' second war with the central government in Moscow resulted from Maskhadov's inability to rein in different factions, in particular Basayev and Khattab.

While the empirics suggest that a turn towards a more religious struggle in Chechnya was influenced by transnational insurgents, they also point to a conditioning variable and an alternative explanation: domestic gatekeepers and domestic roots.

First, the Chechen resistance leaders have played a key role in *allowing* foreigners to have an impact (B. Williams 2007; Moore and Tumelty 2008; 2009). Under President Dudayev (1991–1996), who was not a proponent of establishing an Islamic state, the lead foreign fighter in Chechnya, Khattab, was careful not to challenge the goals or strategies of the domestic insurgent movement. Indeed, during the first Chechen war, Khattab was under the command of Chechen field commanders (e.g. Gammer 2006, 215; Moore 2007; Sokirianskaia 2010, 212). In part, the domestic resistance leaders' upper hand vis-à-vis Khattab in the first war is attributed to the war-effort being funded primarily by the Chechen population in Russia and the Chechen diaspora community – and under the control of Dudayev (Wilhelmsen 2004, 41). Under Yandarbiyev's brief reign (1996–1997), Khattab could do more to fulfill his vision of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus as Yandarbiyev already looked more favorably upon the idea of an Islamic state – and was head of a then war-torn, cash-starved republic. While Yandarbiyev's successor, Maskhadov, was a secularist and not initially a proponent of establishing an Islamic state, Khattab's close alliance to Basayev, who increasingly worked in opposition to Maskhadov, ensured that he had access to Chechen insurgents and people.

Thus the influence of transnational insurgents has to a certain extent been controlled by gatekeepers in the Chechen resistance movement.

Once the movement shifted away from the relatively centralized structure of President's Dudayev's National Guard, it became easier for outsiders to have an influence. Indeed, Maskhadov's presidency was plagued by an inability to control the former field commanders, particularly Basayev. By the fall of 1998, Maskhadov's forces were even engaged in combat with some of the former field commanders (Tishkov 2004; Gammer 2006). This kind of environment, paired with the destruction and poverty of the Chechen republic after the first war, provided space for the influence of outside forces.[24] Notably, the Wahhabi preacher Kebedov escaped from crackdowns on Wahhabism in Dagestan to Chechnya precisely in this time period. At the same time, the influence of the transnationals *contributed* to cleavages and clashes among different armed factions – in turn hampering negotiations with Moscow. Aware of the detrimental effects of such infighting, in April 1999, Maskhadov tried, unsuccessfully, to bridge divisions between different factions (Muzaev 1999b; 1999e).

Second, the empirical record suggests there may be an alternative domestic explanation for the shift in framing that has little or nothing to do with transnational insurgents. Prompted about the influence of Arab fighters in a 2006 interview, Umarov, the leader of the Islamist branch, claimed it was exaggerated. Moreover, he pointed out that, "[t]hese Arabs fight everywhere where there is *jihad*, not only in Chechnya, to fulfill their Muslim duty" (quoted in Jamestown Foundation 2006), suggesting that transnational insurgents came to Chechnya because there already was a *jihad* – not the other way around. Indeed, the shift towards a religious struggle may have been part of a purely domestic strategy to unify the different ethnic groups across the North Caucasus in a struggle against the Russian state, drawing on the religion that these groups shared. In earlier wars in the region, Islam had also been the basis for unity among the different ethnic groups (Gammer 2006, 64–66; Smirnov 2007c; 2007d), and Islamic rhetoric has a history in struggles in the region. Writing about the 1990s, the historian Charles King argues:

Web sites such as kavkazcenter.com – a major channel of communication with the rest of the world – consistently appropriated the Islamic lexicon found in [Caucasian rebel leader] Shamil's letters written 150 years earlier.

---

[24] See Paul Staniland and Sarah Zukerman. "The Effects of Foreign Fighters on Civil Wars: War Fighting, Ideas, and Recruitment." Unpublished paper, Department of Political Science and Security Studies Program, MIT. 2007.

Rather than "Russians," the Web masters spoke of "unbelievers" (*kafirs*). Rather than pro-Russian Chechens, they spoke of "hypocrites" (*munafiqs*). Casualties on the Chechen side were always "martyrs" (*shahids*). There is a world of difference between the Russian Empire's wars in the Caucasus and those of the Russian Federation, but in Chechnya of the early twenty-first century the past still proved a dark template for action (King 2008, 241).

That is, the template for a religious struggle is found both abroad and in Chechnya's own history. Across the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan, the fall of communism and the centralized Soviet state were associated with a return to Islamic practices from the late nineteenth century, including mass pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina (Bobrovnikov 2001). Thus one could argue that the use of the Islamist framing is a strategic last resort of a weakened resistance movement, hoping to create a larger Caucasian alliance in its fight against the Russian state. The timing of a return to such a template, though, during the interwar period, does suggest that transnational insurgents played a role in its revival.

Effect on tactical innovation

The second Chechen war has become associated with large-scale hostage-takings, suicide terrorism, and kidnappings. While the first war also witnessed attacks directed at civilians, notably the hostage-taking at a hospital in Budennovsk in June 1995 and the Kizlyar-Pervomayskoye hostage crisis in January 1996 (both in Dagestan), the second war has been the scene of the most infamous large-scale terrorist attacks. These include the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost theater siege in Moscow in October 2002, where more than 800 people were held hostage (129 killed, including in the rescue operation), and the Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004, where more than 1,100 people were held hostage, most of them schoolchildren (a total of 334 killed). Moreover, suicide bombings, which were absent from the first war, began in the summer of 2000 and peaked between 2003 and 2004 (Nivat 2005; Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006). While the suicide attacks initially targeted only military targets, beginning in 2002, the attacks, several of them featuring women suicide bombers, were also directed at civilians. Suicide attacks have also come to be employed by citizens of other North Caucasus regions, including the bombings of Moscow's metro in March 2010, under the umbrella of Umarov's Islamist struggle. The question for this chapter is whether this tactical

innovation – towards more radical forms of action – can be traced to diffusion from transnational insurgents.

The empirics suggest a hesitant yes. Even though suicide attacks did not take place until 2000, Dudayev had apparently seen such tactics as an option since 1994 (Hughes 2007). In terms of large-scale hostage-takings, while there has been an Arab presence in all four major hostage attacks related to the Chechen wars, in each case, those in charge were Chechen field commanders, and the demands raised were specific to the Chechen conflict – an end to the conflict, withdrawal of Russian forces, and independence – and not about a global *jihad* (Moore and Tumelty 2008, 426; Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006, 10). While the Kremlin played up the Arab presence among the hostage-takers at School No. 1 in Beslan, most of them were Chechen and Ingush, suggesting local motivations (Tuathail 2009). Similarly, the turn to suicide terrorism stems from local grievances, and Chechen resistance leaders have taken responsibility for most of the attacks (Moore and Tumelty 2008, 427). Yet the fact that Arabs were not the dominant actors and the demands were Chechen-centered does not preclude tactics being influenced by transnational insurgents.

Relatively little time passed between the entry of transnational insurgents in Chechnya, with Khattab in February 1995, and the first large-scale hostage event, the Budennovsk hospital siege in June 1995. While Basayev, who orchestrated the attack, early on became a close ally of Khattab, there is too little information about the degree of their contact in the early days of 1995 to assess whether Basayev's choice of tactics was caused by learning or emulation via relational diffusion. Basayev claimed that ten Arabs participated in the attack, which suggests the possibility of relational diffusion, although he also pointed out that he personally supervised the training of these foreigners – not the other way around.[25] He argued that the Budennovsk attack was meant to make Russians feel "the real horror of the war that Moscow had unleashed on his people" (quoted in Quinn-Judge 2004), indicating a homegrown reason for a change in tactics, based on a violence-begets-violence mechanism. Indeed, many members of Basayev's own family, including his wife and two children, had been

---

[25] "Chechen Separatist Chief Admits Arab Involvement in Conflict in North Caucasus," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*ITAR TASS*), November 4, 1996.

killed in a Russian air raid on his hometown just two weeks prior to the attack. Basayev often threatened to again take the struggle to Russian soil and target civilians,[26] but he also claimed that he had not gone to Budennovsk with the intent of taking civilian hostages (Gall and de Waal 1998, 260, 263), and that he did not intend to undertake a similar hostage-taking.[27] Indeed, according to some news reports, the Budennovsk attack was quite spontaneous, almost accidental – allegedly, the rebels were heading for Moscow but had to stop as they ran out of money for bribing the road police. Similarly, the 1996 hostage-takings in Kizlyar and Pervomayskoye, led by Salman Raduyev, appear to have been carried out as a spontaneous second-best alternative after the rebels' attack against a Russian air field in Kizlyar failed (Jamestown Foundation 1996). After the Budennovsk attack, Basayev's deputy, Aslambek Abdulkhadzhiev, emphasized that they never again planned to carry out anything like it, suggesting that such an attack on civilians was, somehow, unacceptable:

Here I must say we do not plan anything like Budennovsk. The Budennovsk tragedy will never be repeated. Moreover, we did not make these plans except as a last resort. Why was the world was silent when Shali was bombed [by the Russians], when some 400 people were killed or wounded? (quoted in Jamestown Foundation 1995)

Abdulkhadzhiev's assessment here is slightly different than later statements posted on the Kavkaz Center website. Consider the following 2009 statement from Umarov, which seems to indicate a degree of acceptance of civilian targets:

(T)his year will be also our offensive year all over the territory of Russia. Why? Because I think that those people who are living today in the territory of Russia, they are also responsible for their soldiers, for their leadership, for those atrocities, for that outrage, that they commit, and for those wars that they wage today against Islam.[28]

---

26 "Next Time It Could be Moscow, Says Chechen Commando Chief," *Agence France Presse*, June 26, 1995.

27 Mikhail Markelov, "Shamil Basayev: 'I Am Not Planning Another Budyonnovsk'," *Russian Press Digest* (*Novaya Gazeta*), September 15, 1995.

28 Emir Dokka Abu Usman: "This Year Will Be Our Offensive Year," Kavkaz Center, May 17, 2009. Available from http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2009/05/17/10700_print.html (accessed August 15, 2012). Umarov had expressed a similar sentiment already in 2005, after his own family was targeted. See "We're Beginning the War on the Territory of Russia," Kavkaz Center,

Thus it looks like radical tactics aimed at civilians have become not just more common over time, but possibly more accepted on the part of the fighters. Indeed, both the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost theater siege and the Beslan school hostage crisis appear to have been more planned as attacks against civilians than the 1995–1996 large-scale attacks.

Such a change in use and acceptance of radical tactics would coincide with the entry of transnational insurgents, but it is important to note that in both quotes above, the actions of the Russians serve as a justification. The second war was characterized by a brutal campaign, including civilian targeting, on the part of the Russian forces (e.g. Politkovskaya 2001, 2003); we thus cannot ignore the possibility that the turn to more radical tactics on the part of the Chechens was a purely domestic response (Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006). We should also not overlook the possibility that the growing kidnapping-for-ransom industry in Chechnya, beginning in the interwar years, was driven purely by the pursuit of profits by criminals (Murphy 2004, 139; Tishkov 2004, 107–126; Zürcher 2007, 105), rather than the influence of outsiders.

Yet if we accept that transnational insurgents over time contributed to the Chechen insurgents' turn towards increasingly radical tactics, what is the evidence for diffusion mechanisms? The hostage crisis that most prominently featured the influence of radical Islam was the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost theater siege in October 2002, where the hostage-takers ahead of time had made a video where they proclaimed they were seeking martyrdom in the name of Allah. The video, which featured women covered in black veils with Arabic script, aired on Al Jazeera during the attack. Timing-wise, it is plausible that the tactics were a result of learning or emulation via both relational and mediated diffusion from transnational insurgents, as both training camps and Salafi schools had been set up in Chechnya in the mid to late-1990s – although there is little information about the kinds of tactics advocated by the transnational insurgents in these fora. According to one account, Khattab put videos of suicide bombings against Russian military barracks online and trained students in hostage-taking techniques in his camps (Murphy 2004, 33, 39), suggesting these were tactics he

May 9, 2005. Available from www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2005/05/09/3778.shtml (accessed August 15, 2012). See also this 2003 interview with another Islamist Chechen commander, Amir Ramzan: "Next Year the War Will Seize the Entire Caucasus," Kavkaz Center, November 28, 2003. Available from www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2003/11/28/2039.shtml (accessed June 7, 2011).

advocated. Similarly, while not independently confirmed, an investigation under President Maskhadov implied that Khattab was behind the kidnapping and killing of six international Red Cross workers in December 1996,[29] again suggesting an acceptance for targeting civilians. Khattab's successor, Abu Walid al-Ghamdi, who had been in Chechnya since the late 1990s but took over Khattab's role when Khattab was killed in the spring of 2002, is reported to have emphasized suicide attacks in Russia over guerilla warfare in Chechnya as an effective tactic (Vidino 2005). In 2003, the second-in-command of the jihad in Chechnya issued a fatwa sanctioning the use of female suicide bombers (Henkin 2006, 198). Moreover, according to Georgian officials, by early 2002 a number of Arab fighters had fled from Afghanistan to the Pankisi gorge in Georgia, located on Chechnya's doorstep, where several hundred Chechen and other insurgents were trained in the use of toxic gases (Vidino 2005; Civil Georgia 2003).[30] By the time of the Dubrovka theater siege in the fall of 2002, then, these reports suggest that the Chechens may have been exposed to and trained by transnational insurgents advocating radical tactics through both relational and mediated diffusions.

Others have suggested that non-relational diffusion also played a role, through news accounts about suicide terrorism in Iraq (Reuter 2004, 6). Indeed, in this respect, Khattab's training camps served as a forum for non-relational diffusion, as the students reported to have seen videos of fighting in Palestine and Kashmir (Sokirianskaia 2010, 213); at least in Palestine, suicide terror had been a tactic since 1994.

As for the domestic insurgents' motivation to adopt or adapt to new tactics, the purpose of the Chechens' video from the Dubrovka theater siege (and a similar video associated with the Beslan school hostage crisis), observers have argued, was to attract funding from external sources in the Middle East (Wilhelmsen 2004, 45; Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006, 11). Thus, to the degree that diffusion took place, it may have been emulation driven by strategic funding concerns, rather than an internalized learning process.

---

[29] "Warlord Khattab Implicated in Murder of Six Red Cross Workers in 1996," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*ITAR TASS*), March 27, 2000.

[30] Basayev claimed that the so called militants in the gorge were actually Chechen refugees. See "Chechen Field Commander Marries Third Wife, Gets Russian POWs as Wedding Gift," *BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit* (*Kavkaz Tsentr*), December 14, 2000.

Just as there is a domestic alternative explanation for shift in framing, there is also a local template for hostage-taking as a tactic. Indeed, hostage-taking has a long tradition in Chechnya, going back to the North Caucasian people's resistance to Russian annexation in the 1700s and 1800s, where both the local population and the Russians resorted to such tactics (King 2008, 53–59). Suicide terrorism, in contrast, does not have a local historical template among the Chechens, despite centuries of conflict with central rulers. Thus in the absence of outside influence, it is unlikely that the Chechens would have turned to such a tactic. Indeed, despite the effect of domestic violence-begets-violence dynamics and the historical template of hostage-taking, the fact that some of the large-scale hostage attacks in the Chechen wars have been aimed at attracting funding from the Middle East suggest that transnational factors have played a role in radicalization of tactics, but perhaps a smaller role than what they are given credit for – especially by the Russian government.

Effect on resource mobilization

Most accounts of transnational insurgents in Chechnya suggest that their key contribution to the domestic resistance movement's resources is not manpower but access to financial resources, primarily in the Middle East, although they have also brought along expertise in communications and use of weapons (Wilhelmsen 2004, 41–46; Vidino 2005; Ware 2005; Hughes 2007; Moore and Tumelty 2008).

Initially, the promise of the transnational insurgents who arrived in February 1995 was their added resources, including both weapons and access to finance, and the know-how and training expertise they brought via relational diffusion in training camps and by fighting side-by-side. In those early days of the war, the Chechen insurgents found themselves overwhelmed against the Russians' airpower. Khattab and his followers were key participants in the Chechens' retaking of Grozny in summer 1996, although the brutal winters in the Caucasus mountains and the lack of knowledge of Russian prevented large numbers of transnational insurgents from joining and contributing to the Chechens' struggle. Indeed, while Basayev admitted to being assisted by Arab fighters in the June 1995 attack on Budennovsk, when asked where he got his weapons, he did not

mention foreign sources. Instead, Basayev emphasized that he was buying his weapons from the Russians.[31]

In the interwar years, the ability of the transnational insurgents to bring both competence and capacity increased. *The Life and Times of Khattab* features Khattab saying that after the first war, he was asked by the military and civilian Chechen leadership to help train insurgents, as the Chechens doubted that the Russians would completely withdraw. Khattab and his crew established training camps in Serzhen'-Yurt, contributing to resource mobilization via relational diffusion. Because financial resources in the immediate aftermath of the war were limited, Khattab notes that they initially had to limit the number of people they were training. However, as they made progress, they accepted up to 400 young men per course, not only from Chechnya but also from Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Tatarstan, Uzbekistan, and elsewhere. Sokirianskaia's ethnographic study includes interviews with Chechens who attended these camps:

After training in the first camp, the best were selected and transferred to the military camp. Guys from Russia were taught mining, explosives, and the like ... This was real military training, these people knew that there would be another war, they were preparing (quoted in Sokirianskaia 2010, 213).

Besides providing competence through his training camps, Khattab did, per his own account, also provide humanitarian relief to the war-torn population via his camps – which furthered his hero image among some Chechens. He continued to fight alongside the Chechens until he was assassinated in 2002.

The transnational insurgents' contributions to the Chechen insurgents' resource mobilization has also been via mediated diffusion, i.e. their link to funding sources outside Chechnya, especially charities in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Murphy 2004, 140–155; B. Williams 2005a). Throughout the first war, Sheikh Fathi, who recruited Khattab to Chechnya, continued to recruit transnational insurgents and was, reportedly, instrumental in channeling funds from the Middle East to the Chechen insurgents. Khattab himself, attuned to the power of propaganda, released tapes of the Chechens' struggle through a network of mosques, which helped recruitment of foreign fighters to Chechnya (Vidino 2005; Tumelty 2006).

---

[31] "Basayev Takes Firm Stand on Chechnya's Independence," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (*Segodnya*), July 26, 1995.

The Chechens used the same strategy in the second war, releasing tapes from the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost theater siege in 2002 and the Beslan school hostage crisis, portraying their struggle as an Islamist one. These tapes were aimed at attracting funding from the Middle East (Wilhelmsen 2004, 45; Speckhard and Ahkmedova 2006). Without having access to the resistance movement's budgets, it is hard to know where their funding actually comes from, but Andrei Smirnov, a journalist covering the North Caucasus, reports that a Chechen field commander in 2003 admitted to receiving funding from international Muslim foundations (Smirnov 2007d).[32] The Chechen field commander Salman Raduyev stated in 1998 that his group was funded by Islamic parties in the Middle East (Muzaev 1998b). More generally, Khattab was an important broker establishing links between the Chechen insurgent movement and Islamic charities (B. Williams 2007, 162). Similarly, the Dagestani Wahhabi preacher Kebedov, who entered Chechnya in the interwar years, was allegedly funded by charities in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the US (Vatchagaev 2007).

The flow of resources may, in turn, have influenced tactical innovation, especially the large-scale attacks such as the Dubrovka/Nord-Ost and Beslan sieges. There are also accounts suggesting that the shift in framing, towards a more religious message, has been affected by concerns for resources. In other words, the domestic movement's concerns for resources may be a catalyst for shifts in the other two processes of mobilization. That trend has not necessarily been welcomed by the domestic population. The Chechen doctor Khassan Baiev notes in his autobiographical account that: "We welcomed the humanitarian aid we received from Middle Eastern countries, but we did not like it when they told us our Islam was not the true Islam. For 400 years we have fought against people telling us what to do" (2003, 206). Even Umarov has had to balance his message, so that he can gain, or at least keep, support among Chechens who may be motivated by self-determination and also attract funding from prospective funders in the Middle East, especially Turkey, who may be skeptical of his true commitment to an Islamist struggle (Smirnov 2007a).

The flow of resources via transnational insurgents has also influenced the balance of power between domestic and transnational insurgents, which in turn has affected both framing and tactical innovation in a

---

[32] See the interview in "Next Year the War Will Seize the Entire Caucasus," Kavkaz Center, November 28, 2003. Available from www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2003/11/28/2039.shtml (accessed June 7, 2011).

radical direction. In the first war, Dudayev was in control of most funding sources, which came from within Russia. In the interwar years, Maskhadov, more cash-starved in an already war-torn republic, became dependent on warlords with external funding bases, thus giving both the warlords and their foreign funders more power (Wilhelmsen 2004, 40, 46). Indeed, in fall 2007, the resistance leader in neighboring Kabardino-Balkaria, Anzor Astemirov, posited that *he* was the one who had convinced Umarov to completely abandon the idea of a Chechen-centered struggle and declare the Caucasus Emirate. His leverage was Umarov's dependence on non-Chechen fighters (Smirnov 2007c).

This attempt to trace resources suggest that the route through which transnational insurgents influence the domestic insurgent movement may start with the resources they bring to the table (or battlefield). If shifts in framing and tactical innovation follow from a wish to attract resources, the motivation causing shifts in these processes is about strategic emulation rather than genuine learning.

Lessons learnt and further research

While the transnational dimensions of intrastate conflicts have received a great deal of attention among both scholars and policy-makers in the last few years, relatively little research has explored how transnational actors influence such struggles. In this study, I theorize and trace the diffusion mechanisms through which one group of such actors, transnational insurgents, have influenced mobilization in the Chechen separatist struggle against the Russian central government. I argue that through both relational and mediated diffusion, which engender either ideationally or instrumentally motivated learning and emulation, transnational insurgents can affect a domestic movement's framing of goals, tactical innovation, and resource mobilization. While researching mechanisms in a civil war setting can be a challenging task due to data limitations – it is, for instance, difficult to get reliable information about an armed group's training, much less whether the students genuinely learnt something from that training – I have sought to overcome these challenges by highlighting the observable implications of my argument and triangulating data from a variety of sources (see also the discussion in Checkel's introductory chapter).

There are lessons in this study for both scholars and policy-makers. For scholars, the study shows that mechanisms highlighted in relatively

peaceful settings by the transnationalism and social movement literatures also apply to more violent realms. For example, just like epistemic communities can influence the framing of a state's foreign policy, transnational insurgents can affect the framing of a domestic movement's goals. Insurgents, too, copy or learn from others. While the emerging scholarship on the transnational relations of civil wars so far has largely assumed that transnational insurgents make such conflicts more likely or more violent, this study draws on the social movement literature to highlight that there are different aspects of a domestic movement's struggle that can be shaped by transnational insurgents – framing of goals, tactical innovation, and resource mobilization. Yet my empirics also point to conditioning variables and alternative explanations, emphasizing the need to carefully consider domestic factors that may either shape or overshadow the role played by transnational insurgents.

For policy-makers, the study suggests that the role of transnational insurgents should not be overstated. Rather than assuming that transnational insurgents influence domestic insurgents and insurgencies, policies ought to be based on a careful examination of if and how these actors influence the different processes in a domestic movement's mobilization effort. Transnational insurgents do not necessarily have unidirectional and identical effects across these processes.

The next step in this research agenda picks up on these varied effects and explores how outsider-induced changes in a domestic movement's mobilization processes are received among the local population.[33] My research so far suggests that it is not a given that transnational insurgents actually strengthen the domestic movement, as the changes they encourage can cause a backlash. While this chapter focuses on how transnational insurgents may influence intrastate struggles by affecting processes internal to the domestic movement, future research should also explore how transnational insurgents, like other activist groups, may shape intrastate conflicts by altering the external political context in which the struggle takes place (see Meyer and Whittier 1994). Indeed, to the degree that concerns about transnational terrorism changes states' policies towards domestic challenges within their borders, these domestic challenges are more indirectly affected by transnational insurgents.

---

[33] Kristin M. Bakke. "Acceptance and Resistance to Foreign Ideas: Transnational Insurgents' Impact on the Chechen Separatists." Unpublished manuscript. Department of Political Science, University College London. 2010.