

Emerging Religion-based Ethnic Nationalism among Russian Muslims; The Case Study of Chechnya and Tatarstan

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This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but purely based on academic purposes.

Abstract

This is not the current demography but Russia is multicultural society since centuries. Many of ethnic identities lost their sovereign or autonomous status by the authoritarian hands of either Tsars or Bolsheviks. However, Post-Soviet political environment once again triggered the ethno-national movements in the Russia. This study deals with the muslims demography in Post-Soviet Russia. Although, the story of ethno-national movements is not just belonged to the Muslims but some of western authorus only criticize Muslims' movements as the symbol of historical militancy or conservatism. On the other hand, by examining political economy of the Chechnya and Tatarstan, this study looks at whether religion-based ethnic nationalisms in Muslims-majority areas of Russia are preferring state-centrisim and federalism, or ethno-national separatism. Furthermore, findings of the study are described within the context of Russian invasions in Ukraine and Russian role of undermining civil war in Syria.

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Introduction

Historically, the Tsar regime was offering some sort of autonomy to linguistically various non-Russian segments of society. However, Bolshevism and Leninism were skeptical about delivering national-cultural autonomy. Later, "Utopian Nationalist Theory" was introduced in order to strengthen totalitarianism in Russia. This theory almost eliminated the pre-existed nominal national-cultural autonomy in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, during the last months of Soviet Union, President of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Boris Yeltsin openly promised to grant sovereignty to "ethno-territories" of Russia "as they believe, and, to reinstate all eliminated ethnic autonomies. In April 1991, Supreme Soviet also passed a law for the rehabilitation of repressed peoples regarding establishing the legal basis for demands and claims of ethno-national groups. But, at the end of 1990, several constituent republics decided to take benefits from the paralyzed central authority of Moscow and tried to follow their own

way. The Chechen Republic declared its full independence. Tatarstan preferred hard political bartering and vetoed the federal laws and constitution. Such orientations forced the federal authorities of Russia to take serious steps about overcoming difficulties in managing ethno-national movements. In March 1992, a federal treaty for dividing the powers among republics was signed in the Kremlin by all federal units except Tatar and Chechen republics. It was actually a major success of Boris Yeltsin's nationality policy which prevented the disintegration of Russia (Foxall, 2014, 18-34) (Protsyk, 2013, 204-210).

In reality, this federal treaty again echoed uncertain and ambitious politics to declare republics as "national states" and to block their hopes by central directives and bureaucracy. As the new Constitution of Russia (with recent amendments) comprises 85 federal subjects including the federal city of Sevastopol and the Republic of Crimea whose addition to the Russian Federation is still disputed internationally as an illegal annexation, these subjects have equal representation as two delegates from each subject in the Federation Council. Though, the level of autonomy is different for each federal subject (International Business Publications Report, Annually Published in 2016). According to the Constitution, there are 46 oblasts, 22 republics, 09 krais, 04 autonomous okrugs, 01 Jewish autonomous oblast and 03 federal cities, the level of autonomy is as follows;

- 1) Oblasts or provinces are the most common category of Russian federal subjects with locally elected legislature and governor (Henderson, 2011, 01) (Orttung, 2000, xiii).
- 2) Republics are nominally autonomous. Each has the authority to draft its own constitution, and directly elected the head of the republic and parliament. Similarly, these republics are permitted to declare their official language along with Russian while, international affairs are only performed by the federal government. Usually, republics are considered the home of ethnic minorities (Henderson, 2011, 02) (Orttung, 2000, xiii).
- 3) Krai are like oblasts. These are administrative divisions within the Russian Federation that were created due to their historical territorial significance (Henderson, 2011, 03) (Orttung, 2000, xiii).
- 4) Autonomous okrugs are also called autonomous districts. Originally, these are autonomous entities within kraia and oblasts created for ethnic minorities. Their status was raised to federal subjects during the 1990s. Besides Chukotka Autonomous Okrug¹, still, all the autonomous okrugs are administrated by any of the oblast or krai of which they are a part (Henderson, 2011, 04) (Orttung, 2000, xiii).
- 5) Jewish Autonomous Oblast near the border of China is an official territory for Jewish after Israel in the entire world. Historically, all the autonomous oblasts were administrated under the

¹ During Soviet Regime, Chukotka became administratively subordinated to Magadan Oblast in 1977 while, it declared its separation from Mafadan to become directly a federal subject of Russia Federation. In 1993, its demand was accepted by Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation (Henderson, 2011, PP.10-11).

jurisdiction of krais but in 1990, it got the status of a federal subject (Henderson, 2011, 05) (Orttung, 2000, xiii).

- 6) Three major cities; Moscow, Sevastopol and Saint Petersburg are also federal subjects that function as separate regions (Henderson, 2011, P.05, Orttung, 2000, P.xiii).

As per the observation of experts in Russian Studies, ethnically divergent republics of Russia which demand the greatest rights can be divided into three categories. The first category is composed of those republics which are more determined in following ethno-national separatism like Chechnya, Tuva and some others of the North Caucasus². The second category consists of large resource-rich republics like Sakha, Komi Republic and Karelia. These republics have vast differences with the federal government over taxes and resource control instead of demanding independence. The third last category contains mixed ethnic republics along the Volga River. These republics have strategic rail, water and pipeline routes along with oil resources. A large number of Russian Buddhist and Muslim population live there. These republics include Udmurtia, Tatarstan, Mordovia, Mari El, Kalmykia and Bashkortostan (Giuliano, 2011, 42) (Orttung, 2000, P.xiv).

However, Russian federal entities having majority of Muslim inhabitants face huge criticism where debate between pro-federation and separatists usually affect the routined lives of local people. A big portion of Muslim inhabitants of Chechnya and Tatarstan along with many other Russian states now claims to be state-centric. However, a significant segment of Chechen and Tatar societies still assume to have glorious future if they will re-acquire sovereign status. Thus, this study looks at the political economy of the ethno-national movements in Chechnya and Tatarstan, that assists to evaluate whether majority of Russian Muslims are state-centric/federalist or ethno-national separatist.

Political Economy of the Movement for Sovereign Chechen Republic of Ichkeria

Ethno-national separatism is still existed in Russian federal subjects of Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan for getting sovereign status as once they had acquired in 1917 by establishing a single state, called "United Mountain Dwellers of the North Caucasus" (also known as Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus). This state was also recognized by some major powers at that time.

As per recent historical facts, Post-Soviet Russia occupied Chechnya when it was planning to introduce the separate currency in 1994. In 1991, when the Chechens declared independence from the Soviet Union to form the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the Ingush chose to secede from the Chechen-Ingush Republic. Thus, in 1992, the Ingush joined the newly created Russian Federation regarding trying to resolve the conflict with North Ossetia peacefully. Ingush were also hoped that the Russians would return their land as a token of their loyalty (Protsyk, 2013, 197-210) (Schaefer, 2010, 108).

² Politically, Northern Caucasus is a territory north of the Greater Caucasus Range. It includes constituent Russian Republics; Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea. It also includes Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar Krai and Southern Federal Districts (Giuliano, 2011, 42).

On an issue of demanding sovereignty and security of Russian strategic resources like oil pipeline, First Chechen War was occurred from December 11, 1994 to August 31, 1996. Aim of this war was only to occupy Grozny but Chechen guerrilla warfare forced federal forces to move back. To prevent from demoralization of federal forces, Russia went for a peace treaty in 1996. On August 07, 1999, Chechnya-based Islamic International Brigade (a militant religious group) occupied the Republic of Dagestan. Dagestan was Russian federal subject and it was bordered with the Chechnya. This lost was not bearable for Russia. Hence, Russian federal forces initiated Second Chechen War on August 26, 1999. In result, Russian troops entered in Chechnya on October 01, 1999 and restored federal control over this territory. Since then, battle among federally appointed officials and secessionist officials is still continue. Both sides claim their authority over same territory (Protsyk, 2013, 197-210) (Schaefer, 2010, 109).

The map given below shows the territory of Chechen-Ingush Republic (1991-1992) and the Chechen Republic of Icheria (1992-2000);



(The region highlighted in green and yellow colors was the territory of Chechen-Ingush Republic (1991-1992) while, the area mentioned in the yellow color was the Chechen Republic of Icheria (1992-2000) which is now declared as the Chechen Republic under Russian Federation)

Since the Russian occupation of Grozny, Chechen ethno-nationalists based Ichkerian government was founded in exile especially in United Kingdom and Poland. On January 23, 2000, a diplomatic representation of Ichkeria was also based in Kabul when Taliban Government of Afghanistan recognized it as a sovereign state (Schaefer, 2010, 110) (Bowker, 2014, 97).

On the other hand, the separatist news agency “Chechenpress” reported on October 31, 2007 that the 5th President of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Dokka Umarov (1964-2013) announces Caucasus Emirate and declares himself as its Emir (ruler). He also integrated the territory of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria as Vilayat Nokhchicho³. This changing status was rejected by several Chechen ethno-national politicians and military leaders who were desiring to continue their support for the existence of sovereign Chechen

³ Vilayat Nokhchicho mean Province of Nokhchicho. It was created in 2007 as one of the Caucasus Emirate’s six vilayats. It considered as the partially successor of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Schaefer, 2010, 108-109).

republic. Similarly, former deputy Prime Minister of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Akhmed Zakayev claimed on November 25, 2007 that he is now the Prime Minister of Ichkeria's government in exile (Schaefer, 2010, 110-113) (Bowker, 2014, 97).

The difference in both announcements clearly showed the division among anti-Russia or anti-federation forces in Chechnya. Moreover, this situation also disappointed the various locals who once supported the cause of sovereign Chechnya. Hence, they have now been ready to be state-centric regarding their secure and protected future under Russian federation.

Moreover, economic study of this region shows that the entire Chechen territory is full of oil and natural gas resources while, the major sources of revenue generation for Russia are machine building, textile manufacturing and tourism. Therefore, Russian occupation of this territory is considered to be essential for generating large-scale revenue. While, similar viewpoint has also been adopted by Chechen ethno-national separatists. Thus, they highlight Chechens' glory when Chechnya was experiencing sovereignty (Calabrese, 2003, 34).

Federal State Statistics Service of Russia, World Bank and the Central Intelligence Service of United States presents some statistics about economic worth of this region that are being presented in the table given below.

Table No: 01

Movement for Sovereign Chechen Republic of Ichkeria							
Claiming Region	Share in National Economy	Share in Total Exports	Consumption in Total Imports	Share in Total Revenue and Tax Collection	Expenditures and Investment by Central Government	Expected Decrement in Foreign Reserves in Case of Separation	Country's Ease of Doing Business Index
Chechen Republic of Russia	0.32%	\$0.263 bn out of \$82.1 bn	\$0.1696 bn out of \$53 bn	\$0.5811 bn out of \$181.6 bn	\$0.6809 bn out of \$212.8 bn	\$1.2685 bn out of \$396.4 bn	51
In Case of Establishing Sovereign Chechen Republic of Ichkeria		Expected Total Exports	Expected Total Imports	Expected Revenue and Tax Collection	Expected Required Expenditures and Investment	Expected Foreign Reserves	Expected Ease of Doing Business Index
		\$0.263 bn	\$0.1696 bn	\$0.5811 bn	\$0.6809 bn	\$1.2685 bn	127

The data is collected from official websites of World Bank and the Central Intelligence Agency of United States, Compiled by the author through statistical evaluations (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

According to the official statistics of Russian Federation, World Bank and CIA, the current exports capacity of the region is high than Saint Lucia and less the Gibraltar that have ranks of 170 and 169 respectively in

the list of countries by exports according to the 2012 estimate. Similarly, imports capacity of the region is low than the Turks and Caicos Islands and high than the Vanuatu who have ranks of 183 and 184 respectively in the list of countries by imports according to the 2006 estimate. At the same time, revenue generating tax collecting capacity of this region is high than Guyana and low than Lesotho according to 2008 estimate while, expenditures level of the region is high than Togo and low than San Marino according to 2011 estimate. Likewise, foreign reserves capacity of the region in case of independence is expected high than the Lithuania and low than the Bhutan according to the 2014-15 estimate. Ease of doing business index can also be expected as 127 in case of independence (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

Chechen ethno-national separatists argue that the region has a capacity to generate revenue up to \$0.8441 bn while, expenditures by the central governments in their respective regions under this movement are approximately calculated as \$0.1696 bn. They have their fundamental right to consume remaining \$0.6745 bn for the betterment of the region (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

On the other hand, state-centric Russians describe the share of this region in the Russian economy with respect to appropriate balance of payment. They argue that the total amount of exports and revenue of the region is \$0.8441 bn but their share in imports and expenditures is \$0.8505 bn that is \$0.0064 bn high than the total amount of exports and revenue the region produce. Therefore, economic worth of this movement is not as strong as Chechen ethno-nationalists claim. Because of economic dependency, Chechnya would require a long time to stand independently (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

Political Economy of the Movement for Sovereign Tatarstan Republic

Tatar ethno-national separatists the Russian Republic of Tatarstan also look for sovereignty. Initially, Tatars were the branch of Turkic people but contemporarily Tatars' genetic history found back during the regime of Genghis Khan's grandson Batu Khan (1207–1255) when this clan developed relations with Hazaras⁴ and Mongols⁵ (Selbach, 2003, 01) (Protsyk, 2013, 154). There are four social groups within Tatars. These are;

- Volga Tatars, live in Volga region (Russia)
- Crimean Tatars, live in Crimea,
- Lipka Tatars, live in Belarus, Poland and Lithuania
- Astrakhan Tatars in Astrakhan Oblast (Russia), and,
- Siberian Tatars in eastern region of Ural Mountains (Russia) (Selbach, 2003, 01) (Protsyk, 2013, 154).

⁴ An ethnic group emerged from mixing of Turco-Mongol and local Iranian population, contemporarily live in Pakistani provinces of Sindh and Balochistan, and, central Afghanistan (Selbach, 2003, P.01).

⁵ An East-Central Asian ethnic group, belong to Mongolia, Russia and China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (Selbach, 2003, P.01).

Due to the part of Volga region, present day Tatarstan consists of Volga Tatars population. Its current territory was once the part of Volga Bugaria since 700 to 1238. However, Mongol invasion of this territory renamed the inhabitants of respective region as “Volga Tatars”. Furthermore, they got independence under the Khanate of Kazan⁶ in 1430. During 1550s, Tsarist Russia occupied this khanate. In 1918, Tatar ethno-national separatists proclaimed establishment of their sovereign republic with the name of “Idel-Ural State” during Russian Civil War. However, in 1920, Bolsheviks again captured this region, and established Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Han, 2010, 02-15) (Protsyk, 2013, 155).

In February 1989, All-Tatars Public Center (a social organization of Tatars, also called ATPC) formed with having separatist agenda. During 1989-90, ATPC organized several demonstrations in favor of sovereign Tatarstan Republic that resulted clashes with Russian nationalists. On August 30, 1990, Tatarstan Government announced sovereignty with the “Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic”. Similarly, Tatarstan held a referendum in 1992 on the new constitution of sovereign republic which was approved by 62 percent of total population. However, declaration of sovereignty, constitution and referendum were declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Russia. In 1994, a treaty was signed on “Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects and Mutual Delegation of Authority between the State Bodies of the Russian Federation and the State Bodies of the Republic of Tatarstan” and an agreement was signed on “Delimitation of Authority in the Sphere of Foreign Economic Relations”. By this treaty and agreement, Tatarstan became a de-facto constituent republic within Russian Federation. In March 2002, several amendments were introduced in the Constitution of Tatarstan, among which, articles 01 and 03 of the constitution describe Tatarstan as an official part of Russian Federation (Han, 2010, 16-50) (Protsyk, 2013, 155-158).

In reaction of Russian recognition for sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26, 2008, Milli Majlis of the Tatar People declared independence of Tatarstan on December 20, 2008. It also asked United Nations for recognition but both; the United Nations and the Russian government ignored this declaration (Han, 2010, 51) (Protsyk, 2013, 159). The map given below highlights the contemporary territory of Tatarstan which is being claimed by the Tatar ethno-nationalists;

⁶ Kazan is still a largest city and capital of Russian republic of Tatarstan (Selbach, 2003, P.01).



(The territory mentioned under the dark green borders is the contemporary territory of Tatarstan Republic within Russian federation.)

For analyzing economic factors behind this movement, it is observed that major natural resources of Tatarstan are oil, natural gas and gypsum. It is estimated that this federated republic has over one billion tons of oil deposits. It is one of the most economically developed regions of Russia. GDP per capita was USD 12,325 in 2004, while, it was 930 billion Rubles in 2008. The republic has a highly developed transport network. It mainly comprises railway lines, highways, four navigable rivers; Volga (Idel), Vyatka (Noqrat), Kama (Culman) and Belaya (Agidel), and airports and oil pipelines. The territory of Tatarstan is crossed by the main gas pipelines carrying natural gas from Yamburg and Urengoy to the west and the major oil pipelines supplying oil to numerous cities within the European part of Russia (Cornago, 2013, 116) (Protsyk, 2013, 160-164). The table given below would be more helpful in understanding the economic worth of this region statistically.

Table No: 02

Movement for Sovereign Tatarstan Republic							
Claiming Region	Share in National Economy	Share in Total Exports	Consumption in Total Imports	Share in Total Revenue and Tax Collection	Expenditures and Investment by Central Government	Expected Decrement in Foreign Reserves in Case of Separation	Country's Ease of Doing Business Index
Tatarstan Republic of Russia	0.45%	\$0.3695 bn out of \$82.1 bn	\$0.2385 bn out of \$53 bn	\$0.3672 bn out of \$181.6 bn	\$0.957 bn out of \$212.8 bn	\$1.7838 bn out of \$396.4 bn	51
In Case of Establishing Sovereign Republic of Tatarstan		Expected Total Exports	Expected Total Imports	Expected Revenue and Tax Collection	Expected Required Expenditures and Investment	Expected Foreign Reserves	Expected Ease of Doing Business Index
		\$0.3695 bn	\$0.2385 bn	\$0.3672 bn	\$0.957 bn	\$1.7838 bn	122

The data is collected from official websites of World Bank and the Central Intelligence Agency of United States, Compiled by the author through statistical evaluations (Cornago, 2013, 116) (Han, 2010, 16-51) (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

According to the official statistics of Russian Federation, World Bank and CIA, Tatarstan Republic currently has high exports capacity than the Maldives and less than the Afghanistan that have ranks of 169 and 168 respectively in the list of countries by exports according to the 2012 estimate. Similarly, imports capacity of the respective region is low than the Solomon Islands and high than the Central African Republic in the list of countries by imports according to the 2007 estimate. At the same time, revenue generating tax collecting capacity of the region is high than Belize and low than Guyana according to 2008 estimate while, expenditures level of the region is high than Laos and low than Haiti according to 2008 estimate. Likewise, foreign reserves capacity of the region in case of independence is expected high than the Kyrgyzstan and low than the Armenia according to the 2015-16 estimate. Ease of doing business index can also be expected as 122 in case of independence (Maksimov, 2008, 416-418) (Gouchinova, 2013, 19-21) (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

According to Tatar ethno-national separatists, the region has a capacity to generate revenue up to \$0.7367 bn but expenditures by the central government in this region are approximately calculated as \$0.957 bn. They claim that Russian government consume extra amount of \$0.2203 bn just to secure its beneficiary assists in the region instead of betterment for the domestic people (Maksimov, 2008, 416-418) (Gouchinova, 2013, 19-21) (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

On the other hand, Pro-Russian elements discuss economic worth of Tatarstan Republic under Russian economy with respect to appropriate balance of payment. According to them, the total amount of exports and revenue of the region is \$0.7367 bn but their share in imports and expenditures is \$1.1955 bn that is

\$0.4588 bn high than the total amount of exports and revenue the region produce. Such huge figure clearly shows the high level economic dependency of the region upon Russian Federation. Therefore, several ethnographers do not see the future of Tatar people as inhabitants of a sovereign state (Maksimov, 2008, 416-418) (Gouchinova, 2013, 19-21) (The World Fact Book, 2016) (Countries Statistics, 2016) (Asim, 2016) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016).

To see all these economic and political factors, it is concluded that economy is the big reason behind claiming this area by both; Tatars ethno-national separatists and Russian nationalists. According to census 2010, Tatars are 53.2 while, Russians are 39.7 percent of total population (Foxall, 2014, 57). Therefore, Russian federal elites are still feeling the sentiments for sovereignty in this constituent republic that would be grown in reaction of any socio-political or economic exploitation or discrimination (Foxall, 2014, 57).

Conclusion

Experience of Post-Soviet Chechnya and Tatarstan tells that ethnic nationalism plays a greater role in determining political and economic worth of any territory. Not only these two federated republics but many other Russian federal entities are suffering from rivalry among state-centric nationalism and ethno-national separatisms till now. As Martha Lagace describes that the concept of nationalism can only be presented by any ethnic group when it defines its unique political, economic and cultural objectives, ethno-national movements in Chechnya and Tatarstan highlight four constructs of designing economic policy under ethnic nationalism (Lagace, 2016). These constructs are;

- 1) Ethnic nationalism sets a direction for economic growth in case of getting independence or regional autonomy (Lagace, 2016).
- 2) Ethnic nationalism defines regional economy as the only source of nation's well-being (Lagace, 2016).
- 3) Ethnic nationalism motivate its followers to accept temporary economic loses for gaining higher national goals (Lagace, 2016).
- 4) Ethnic nationalism points out glorious economic history of the territory under different regimes just to propagate nation's superb economic future (Lagace, 2016).

If state-centric nationalism will be strong in any country, such constructs would not disturb it political or economically while, strengthen ethno-national separatism or separatisms would become a reason of disturb it politically and economically. Therefore, analysis of political economy of any ethno-national movement is also based on these constructs as analyzed in Post-Soviet Russia.

However, multicultural studies of Russia during 2023 elaborates that the differences among anti-federation Muslim militants have coerced the remaining Muslim population to think;

- Within the Russian federation, they would be more protected and secure.
- Russia is regaining its status of major power across the globe.
- Russian position in international politics specifically after annexing Ukrainian entities of Crimea, Donestks and Luhansk shows the weakness of United States, NATO and EU.

- Hence, whatever US, NATO or EU officials say about Chechen' or Tatars' independence, they should not be triggered, and must stay peacefully and rationally within Russian federation.
- In case of declaring independence, they would face Russian rivalry similar to Ukraine. West is not in position to support any anti-Russia segment.
- As Russia has played a vital role in establishing peace in Syria and Iraq, Russian Muslims can live peacefully and gloriously within the Kremlin patronage.
- Iran-Russia cardinal relations also urge Russian Muslims to be called Russians when they are warmly welcomed by Iranian authorities and public.

Hence, the facts investigating above causing the emergence of Religion-based (or also called Muslims-based) state-centrism among Russian Muslims, and they are now feel proud to be Russian rather than to be called extremist, militant, conservative or anti-federation.

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