

CHECHEN USE OF THE INTERNET IN THE RUSSO-CHECHEN CONFLICT

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

CHECHEN USE OF THE INTERNET IN THE RUSSO-CHECHEN CONFLICT, by  
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The emergence of the Internet as a global information network has impacted the conduct of information operations. In their quest for independence from Russia, Chechens have made wide use of the Internet to influence the battlefield. This thesis examines how three Chechen-sponsored websites attempt to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict. The study methodology employed an instrument to describe the design, content, and behavior of the websites. Two websites were analyzed according to this methodology. The third website, by virtue of its unavailability for study, required a different analytical approach that yielded unique data. The thesis concludes that Chechen subgroups use the Internet differently to broadcast actions, mobilize, fund raise, communicate, and unite. The Internet, with its anonymity and ubiquity, offers advantages to small, endangered groups seeking a communications and information management network.

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## DEFINITIONS

**Information Operations.** Information Operations (IO) involve actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems (Joint Publication 3-13, vii).

**Information Warfare.** Information Warfare (IW) is information operations conducted during a time of crisis or conflict to achieve or promote specific objectives over a specific adversary or adversaries (Joint Publication 3-13, II-4).

**Psychological Operations.** Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) are actions to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences. They are designed to influence emotions, motives, reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals (Joint Publication 3-13, GL-7).

**Netwar.** Netwar is an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, short of traditional military warfare, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age. These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed organizations, small groups, and individuals who can communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, often without a precise central command (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997, 6).

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Russo-Chechen Wars of 1994 to 1996 and 1999 to the present are among the most brutal and publicized conflicts in the post-Cold War era (Aldis 2001, 3). A unique dimension of these wars is the use of an emerging media--the Internet--to conduct information operations. The anonymity and unrestricted nature of the World Wide Web has become a new support structure for outgunned combatants. This support structure has developed new methods to influence public opinion, create psychological effect, publicize actions, mobilize, communicate, and raise funds. The Internet, a technology that epitomizes globalization and technological progress, has emerged as a force multiplier in Chechnya.

The “virtual” component of the Russo-Chechen Wars is nearly a decade old (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 17). Both Russians and Chechens continue to attempt new methods and means to exploit the Internet. The tactics and techniques of Internet usage in this modern, low-intensity conflict are still largely unexplored by political-military analysts.

The primary question this thesis asks is: How are the Chechen-sponsored websites designed to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict? The secondary question is: What are the methods employed, via the Internet, to conduct information warfare, recruitment, mobilization, fundraising, communication, and to generate public support?

Chapter 1 provides the background of the Russo-Chechen Wars. In this background, emphasis is put on the use of media, particularly the Internet. Next, the

scope, limitations and delimitations are addressed. The final paragraph of chapter 1 discusses the significance of the study.

### Background

The following section details the background of the Russo-Chechen Wars, commonly referred to as the First Chechen War (1994-1996) and the Second Chechen War (1999-present). Incorporated into the background is a discussion of the Internet's impact on the conflict.

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in December 1991 unleashed a torrent of independence movements among the former USSR republics. In the Caucasus region, ethnic infighting and widespread desires for autonomy unleashed a torrent of small-scale conflicts (Seely 2001, 124-126). Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia successfully established independence in the post-Soviet structure. Among the smaller groups and regions seeking autonomy in the Caucasus were the Ossetians, Cherkess, Laks, Chechens, Ingush, Avars, Abkhazians, and Karbardians (Seely 2001, 124). Nearly all these regional movements concerned territory controlled by Russia. Russia, concerned that its future interests in the strategic Caspian Sea region were threatened and fearing the creation of a Muslim confederation in the area, resisted the "Balkanization" of this region.

Among the states seeking independence was Chechnya (appendix A). About the size of Connecticut with a population of 1.2 million, Chechnya declared its independence from Russia on 01 November 1991. The Chechen Republic was headed by a former Soviet Air Force General and ethnic Chechen named Dzhokhar Dudayev (Seely 2001, 90-92). Repeated Russian attempts to reestablish political control over the breakaway

republic failed (Communist Voice, 2002). However, Dudayev's greatest challenge in the fledgling republic was controlling the internal strife and lawlessness that characterized Chechnya. By the summer of 1994, Dudayev's control over Chechnya was faltering (Seely 2001, 163). Recognizing the opportunity to depose Dudayev and install a Moscow-friendly Provisional Council, Russia decided to support an opposition movement of ethnic Chechens with equipment and some troops. The opposition carried out a failed "black operation" on 26 November 1994, that led to the decision to intervene in Chechnya with force (Seely 2001, 169).

In December 1994, Russian troops entered the Chechen capital city of Grozny to "establish constitutional order in Chechnya and to preserve the territorial integrity in Russia" (Oliker 2001, ix-xv). Heavily armored Russian units were led to believe that Chechen resistance would be light. It was not. Chechen resistance was fierce, organized, and effective. The Russian campaign in Grozny was a violent, urban battle that cost high casualty rates among Russian units.<sup>1</sup> In short, the Russian forces were unprepared to fight even a lightly defended metropolis with a population sympathetic to the Chechen rebels. Through overwhelming firepower and mass, the Russians ultimately occupied Grozny. This occupation, however incomplete, was short-lived. A rebel counteroffensive in the summer of 1996 regained control of the city and forced Russian units out of the breakaway region. Thus ended the First Chechen War.

Not only did the Russians fail to defeat the Chechen rebels militarily, but the Russians were not prepared to fight and win the "information war." This failure prevented the mobilization of national will and soured international support.

Analysts of this war readily cite the shortfalls of the Russian campaign in Chechnya: inadequate intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), ad hoc units unsuited and untrained in urban operations, unwarranted optimism about the Chechen defenses, inadequate coordination measures among units, poor communication techniques, and mishandling of the media (Celestan 1996).

In the First Chechen War, the Chechens were more adroit than the Russians at manipulating all forms of media. Television and press coverage were welcomed by the Chechens, who provided access to scenes of destroyed Russian equipment and dead Russian soldiers (Thomas 2000, 112).

This coverage had a twofold effect. First, it undermined official Russian reports of success against the rebels. By undermining the Russian account of the war, a second order effect occurred: Russian public opinion turned against the war. Chechen “steered” images of the war became so prevalent on Russian television that Russian mothers began to make their way to Chechnya to bring their sons home (Oliker 2001, 34; and Seely 2000, 255). The ignominious withdrawal of Russian units from Grozny in August 1996 signified a political defeat as much as a military defeat for the Russians.

By 1995, the Chechens had created a Ministry of Information to coordinate the information war (Thomas 2000, 116). At the same time, the concept of ‘hetwar’ was developing rapidly. The proliferation of the Internet in the mid-1990s was evidenced by the exponential increase in the number of users, the explosion of the World Wide Web, live digital feeds, video libraries, chatrooms, and links. Chechen experimentation with the Internet began during this period and proved an effective tool against the Russians (Goble 1999; and Eichrodt 1999).

The Internet differed from television, radio, newspapers, and magazines in that it required little infrastructure to support, no hierarchical organization to coordinate, and it presented an elusive target. In short, the Internet was, and is, an optimal medium for insurgents, rebels, separatists, terrorists--any group with restricted access to traditional media forms. Internet usage is cheap, easy, virtual, and prolific; exactly the type of asymmetric warfare that the weak can use to exploit the strong. In the battle to control the “story” of the conflict, the equality of information accessibility offered by the Internet can nullify the advantage of the combatant in control of traditional forms of media (television, radio, and print).

In October 1999, Russian President Vladimir V. Putin launched an aggressive offensive into Chechnya, focusing heavily on capturing the capital city of Grozny (Smith 2000, 4-7). Thus began the Second Chechen War (1999 to present).

Armed with lessons from the First Chechen War, the Russian campaign resulted in the capture of Grozny in February 2000. Both sides suffered heavy losses and the number of internally displaced persons was estimated to be 230,000.<sup>2</sup>

Russian efforts to control the media and to wage their own “information warfare” were much improved over the first war. First, the Russians placed experienced personnel in positions to handle the media. Second, they filtered information out of Chechnya to control the information dissemination process. Third, the Russians began employing the Internet to convey their message. This last improvement included the operation of Russian designed websites. The Russians were largely able to convey themselves as fighting an antiterrorist campaign and were more effective in transmitting stories of their successes (Thomas 2000, 113-116; and Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 17).

The Russian improvement in controlling television and press coverage coincided with an increased Chechen presence on the Internet. Sophisticated Chechen websites established by Chechen Information Minister Movladi Udogov increasingly became the public affairs and psychological operations mouthpiece for the Chechen rebels (Nikolayev 1999). The Russians estimated there were nearly 100 Chechen websites throughout the world operating in twenty languages (Eichrodt 1999; and Thomas 2000, 121). When the Chechen rebels were ultimately forced out of Grozny in February 1999, a networked form of communication became even more important. The use of the Internet to unite Chechens and to continue to pursue the course of independence remains a major component of the current websites.

Given the above background information on the Russo-Chechen Wars, the scope, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the thesis are now discussed.

#### Scope

The scope of this thesis is on the methods employed, via the Internet, to wage informational warfare. The primary data are three Chechen-sponsored websites.<sup>3</sup>

#### Limitations and Delimitations

A major limitation in analyzing information operations on the Internet is the virtual presentation of information. Websites, and the information therein, are not subject to any uniform scrutiny for accuracy, truth, or verifiability. The sites change as readily as the information posted on them. Furthermore, recovering historical data on websites is often difficult. Websites undergo constant updates, and in the case of the Chechens, the origin of the websites can be difficult to verify. Though this limitation signifies a

constraint on the research, it is also precisely what makes this topic so interesting to evaluate.

Another notable limitation is language. This study includes an analysis of websites which are published in English. Websites that are in only Chechen and Russian will not be analyzed, due to language constraints.

Four key delimitations are observed to stay within the scope of the thesis. First, this thesis does not judge the effectiveness of Chechen or Russian netwar during the First or Second Chechen War. To determine the influence of the Internet on the outcome of these wars is beyond the scope of this study. Second, this thesis does not focus on the technical aspect of netwar. The attacking of networks through viruses, hacking, and other means is a topic too broad to fully develop in this thesis. The technical aspects of netwar are addressed merely to establish the background and scope of this tactic as it applies to the research question. Third, only three Chechen-sponsored websites were examined. Finally, this thesis is a current evaluation of three websites, not a historical or evolutionary study of Chechen websites.

### Significance

The Internet explosion has introduced unique informational implications and organizational changes. Futurists John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt wrote in 1997, “The rise of network forms of organization--particularly ‘all-channel networks,’ in which every node can communicate with every other node--is one of the single most important effects of the information revolution for all realms: political, economic, social, and military. It means that power is migrating to small, non-state actors who can organize sprawling

networks more readily than can traditionally hierarchical nation-state actors” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997, 5).

The information warfare template used by the Chechens against the Russians demonstrates the vulnerabilities of large states combating small states. The United States is arguably vulnerable to similar tactics in the war against terrorism. To combat such asymmetric approaches, they must first be understood. This thesis will add to the body of knowledge on the use of the Internet to wage information warfare.

As the United States embarks on a global war on terrorism, the implications of Internet usage by her adversaries are critical. An analysis of how and why the Chechen diaspora are exploiting this media can assist in understanding this method of information warfare.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The Russo-Chechen Wars have produced a significant number of military studies, essays, theses, and articles. Likewise, there exists a wide body of scholarship on the psychosocial aspects of the Internet. However, the confluence of these topics--Internet usage in the Russo-Chechen Wars--has not been broadly studied.

This review is organized into four sections. Reviewed first is the scholarship on the psychosocial aspects of the Internet in general. Second, research on the use of the Internet as a means of information warfare is discussed. Third, the literature on Internet use during the Russo-Chechen Wars is discussed. The last section will summarize the research and denote shortfalls in the available body of research.

#### Psychosocial Aspects of the Internet

The following research categories are discussed: virtual communities, cyberculture, and the psychology of cyberspace.

#### Virtual Communities

Advances in telecommunications, computers, and software applications in the early 1990s spawned the creation of virtual communities. Virtual communities are online locales where users congregate and communicate. Like physical communities, virtual community members chat, argue, organize, buy and sell merchandise, proselytize, lie, and fall in love (Rheingold 1993).

Virtual communities, once the domain of “techies” are now ubiquitous (Rheingold 2001). The advent of the user-friendly Internet interface and easy-to-access

websites has opened virtual communities to even the most novice user (Johnson 1997). Like most communities or clubs, virtual communities attract those with special interests, issues, or backgrounds who wish to come together. In the physical world, geographic distance or the inability to match up certain people deems such congregation improbable. Conversely, creating such a group in cyberspace creates a social center that is always easily accessible, open, and convenient (Suler 1996).

A special interest group can establish a community site using the tools available on the Internet: websites, electronic mail lists, private electronic mail, newsgroups, chat, telephone contacts, hardcopy communications, and in-person meetings (Suler 1996). Through one or all of these communication enablers, virtual communities can organize, grow, subdivide, and develop their ideology. Overall, these organizations foster a sense of recognition and belonging among members (Suler 1996). Virtual communities provide the forum and the link to unite and develop personal contacts and relationships.

These communities allow for widespread dissemination of news, opinions, recruitment, and fundraising. Criminal groups or insurgent groups can readily engage in virtual communications without the danger inherent in physical gatherings (Williams 1994, 36: 96-113). This advantage alone makes virtual communities an attractive option for illegal or subversive activities. The formation of a virtual community is an excellent organizational option for insurgent or rebel groups, such as the Chechens.

### Cyberculture

One of the byproducts of computer hyperconnectivity is the development of "cyberculture." This phenomenon describes the scholarship, trends, industries, and studies of the social and technical impacts of the information age (Silver 2000, 19-30).

Though not academic or scholarly by design, the cottage-industry of cyberculture studies produces some of the most insightful and prophetic commentary on how information technology is rapidly changing the world (Dibbel 1993, 112: 36-42).

Popular cyberculture seeks to capture the new trends and publicize and analyze the cultural idiosyncrasies that arise from transformational technologies (Dibbel 1998). The importance of this literature is how popular cyberculture creates a fertile environment for emerging trends, means of communications, and design experimentation. Most websites today have borrowed from the techniques, designs, and experimentations created by cyberculture's innovators (Silver 2000, 4).

Cyberculturists frequently use the "frontier" metaphor to describe the uncharted but vastly rich and powerful territories of cyberspace (Silver 2000, 4). It is an apt metaphor that captures the excitement and opportunity in this richly complex, communication infrastructure. Cyberculture is relevant to this study because the innovations and experimentations in website designs breed novel attempts to influence audiences. These emerging techniques are readily available to criminals, terrorists, or insurgents. Like a new weapon, there often is no immediate counter to a new method, making it effective in the short term.

### Psychology of Cyberspace

The virtual world creates a unique psychological dynamic that governs communications. In addition to the characteristics of the person, internetted systems influence behaviors, communications, and perceptions. In *The Basic Psychological Features of Cyberspace* (1996), Dr. John Suler analyzes the effects of digitization on human interaction. Dr. Suler builds a paradigm for understanding and evaluating the

experiences of virtual communications. Pertinent to this thesis are five of Suler's characteristics of digitized communications (Suler 1996, 2-7):

1. Identity Flexibility allows one to reveal portions of oneself, assume an imaginative identity, or remain entirely invisible, all of which can lead to altered perceptions. For groups with adversaries, this tenet allows the communicator to conceal his or her identity for protection.

2. Altered Perceptions denotes blending the mind with the computer monitor's images and words. Computer interfaces often produce a dreamlike quality and the information display ultimately influences how and what one thinks. Propaganda is designed to exploit these altered perceptions with its crafted presentation of photos, stories and images.

3. Equalized Status or "net democracy" denotes the principle that everyone has an equal opportunity to voice him or herself. Skill in communicating--not necessarily merit of ideas--can often determine one's influence. Equalized status is a valuable tool for the individual or small group fighting against a larger, more powerful adversary.

4. Recordability refers to the documented interactions and correspondences that are saved in computer files. For example, certain perceptions or perceived injustices can be tracked, recorded, and referenced. Recordability is a powerful Internet tool for demagoguery, propaganda, and slander.

5. Transcended Space refers to the ability of the Internet to gap geographical distances easily. For groups with dubious motivations, this feature of cyberspace allows centralized planning from decentralized locations at low risk of detection.

These characteristics of computerized communications are useful in the analysis of the methods and designs of websites.

### Internet in Information Warfare

The following categories of information warfare are discussed: landmark information warfare publications, Al-Qaeda information warfare, and online propaganda.

#### Landmark Information Warfare Publications

The study of the Internet in information warfare dates back to Alvin Toffler's conceptualized networks in *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980). Toffler vaguely conceptualized that networks would exploit information as a weapon of war.

The current landmark works on netwar and information warfare are by RAND consultants John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (1997, 2001). *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, published in 1997, Arquilla and Ronfeldt found that "organization is as crucial as technology in the information revolution; this revolution is giving rise to network forms of organization; and the rise of networks will continue to accrue power to nonstate actors, more than to states, until states adapt by learning to remold their hierarchies into hybrids that incorporate network design elements" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997, v). This work explores the traditional tenets of information warfare (propaganda, psychological operations, perception management) with the opportunities of cyberspace. The result is that new modes of war, terrorism, crime, and radical activism are emerging (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997, vi).

Arquilla and Ronfeldt state that the information age has a transforming effect on war. "The information age is facilitating two major organizational trends: one is the rising power of small groups, the other is the rise of network forms of organization" (Arquilla

and Ronfeldt 1997, 455). This observation is the launching point for Arquilla and Ronfeldt's follow-up study, *Networks and Netwars* (2001).

The organizational transformation from hierarchies to networks is the predominant theme of *Networks and Netwars*. Examined are netwars in Serbia, East Timor, Chechnya, Chiapas, and others.

Arquilla and Ronfeldt state that the effectiveness of Chechen netwar is ultimately difficult to deduce based on the excessive use of force by the Russians to hold power. They judge Chechen netwar in the First Chechen War a "substantial success." They grade the Chechen netwar campaign in the Second Chechen War a "failure" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 17). The Chechen case suggests being cautious about the claims of netwar, especially when overwhelming violence is employed by one or both sides.

Groups seeking autonomy or with separatist agendas (e.g., Chechens and Hamas) seem to have a significant emphasis on violence--both in their website content and in their actions (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 19). Arquilla and Ronfeldt label this an observation, but not a trend, as the sampling of groups using the Internet to pursue separatist agendas remains small.

#### Al-Qaeda and Information Warfare

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the information warfare tactics of Al-Qaeda were studied and subsequently countered by U.S. officials and private sector companies alike (Eedle 2002, 14: 24-27). Like the Chechens, Al Qaeda employed the Internet to globalize their cause. Al Qaeda's website, [www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com), was "professionally produced, database-driven site with an imaginative webmaster" (Eedle 2002, 14: 25). The site published its own reports of fighting in Afghanistan as well as

international articles related to Al-Qaeda. Also posted on the site were fatwas (decisions on the application of Muslim law) and video footage of alleged Al-Qaeda fighters.

Since 11 September 2001, the [www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com) remains something of a fugitive itself. Unable to find an Internet service provider to host the site, the single, authoritative web site has changed addresses several times but has not managed to remain accessible to Internet users (Eedle 2002, 14: 25). Indicative of the tactics of netwar, the address, [www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com), once used by Al-Qaeda, now states, "This site hacked, tracked and owned by the U.S.A." ([www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com), 27 September 2002). Following this flashy proclamation, a link is provided to a user group whose "hobby" is hacking terrorist websites (<http://cgi.thewetlandsinc.com/newdiscus/messages/>, 16 October 2002).

Al-Qaeda's use of the Internet is pertinent because it has generated research in the use of coded messages, dead-mail drops, and encrypted communication (Kelly 2002). These methods are designed to exploit available technology to conduct clandestine communication. The employment of such techniques, for groups such as the Chechens or Al Qaeda, would be invaluable in conducting near-instantaneous communication with little chance of detection.

One such method, steganography, takes one piece of information and hides it in another. Steganography places data (images, files, and sounds) in the unused portion of computer files, accessible only to those who know where and how to look for them. This parasitic technique allows seemingly innocuous communications, electronic mail, or websites to contain encrypted messages. Al-Qaeda is not believed to have employed steganography, but the increased denial of cyberspace to groups like Al-Qaeda will force

them to employ encrypted communication if they opt to continue to use the Internet (Reuters 2001).

The Chechens, largely denied the sanctuary of their homeland, could use clandestine communication to their great advantage. Whether the Chechens are using these advanced techniques is largely undetermined.

#### Online Propaganda

The ease of Internet access has allowed partisan propaganda to flourish. Online propaganda differs from television, radio, and printed propaganda because of its demographic audience and its open access.

A survey of the conflict-related propaganda online suggests that certain demographic groups are targeted (Avgerou and Walsham 2000). The preponderance of users on the Internet are educated, international, younger professionals or decisionmakers with some level of interest in that region's conflict (Stroehlein 2002). Thus, websites are often translated into English, or in the case of Chechnya, into Russian.

Unlike television or radio, there exists a vast "digital divide" between developed and undeveloped regions. The presentation of propaganda reflects this divide and fosters an "outside looking in" style of presentation. With censored and partisan media coverage in many regions, the Internet is often the best window for outsiders to look into local conflicts. The public's opinions of the conflict are based largely on this information, thus making it a potent arena for one-sided story telling.

Online propaganda is also unique in that it can circumvent traditional media outlets, like television, radio, and print. The Internet provides antiestablishment forces an outlet to tell their "narrative" without any filter. This method of sending information from

the inside to the outside was used effectively by the Chechens in 1996 to counter the exaggerated reports of Russian military successes in the region (Krushelnycky 2000).

Online access means that all sides of the conflict can project their views to the world (Stroehlein 2002, 1). This capability challenges the dominance of traditional propaganda outlets. Further, the veracity of any form of reporting can be quickly countered with stories, photos, and video footage posted to websites.

#### Internet Use in the Russo-Chechen Wars

Chechen use of the Internet during the Russo-Chechen conflict demonstrated that online access can be advantageous to smaller, antigovernment forces. The Chechens exploited this media form, as well as others, to gain significant victories in the information war (Goble 1999).

Most analyses credit the Chechens with insightful and effective use of the Internet to publicize their plight and to discredit the Russian accounts of the conflict (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 17-18). First person accounts from Russian officials and military commanders confirm the effectiveness of Chechen information war tactics, especially during the First Chechen War. Though the Chechens are credited with information warfare successes during the First Chechen War, the impact of Internet usage as part of this campaign is largely undetermined.

A Chechen-sponsored website, [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org), became a hugely popular source of information for Russians in 1999. The site ranked twenty-first in Russia, based on number of hits (Eichrodt 1999, 2). Not only did this allow the Chechens to publicize their “story,” but it enabled the Chechens to employ psychological tactics to create widespread fear among Russians (Thomas 2002). The portrayal of the Russians as a bedraggled army

losing a war was effective in damaging Moscow's credibility and the loss of public support for the war (Oliker 2001, 34-35).

During the Second Chechen War, the Russians improved their public relations regarding actions in Chechnya (Thomas 2000). Largely denied access to journalists, the Chechens relied heavily on the Internet to counter Russian controlled stories coming out of Chechnya (Goble 1999; and Oliker 2001, 63).

A 2002 analysis of specific Chechen websites, past and current, revealed five key goals: (1) raise money to support the Chechen cause; (2) unite the Chechen diaspora; (3) publicize Chechen combat successes via video, text, and photos; (4) rally Islamic faithful seeking to unite a religious sector; and (5) broadcast Russian atrocities in an attempt to gain world sympathy (Thomas 2002).

Chechen successes in the First Chechen War demonstrated how an adroit information operations campaign from a weaker opponent can demonstrably challenge a larger opponent. In the Second Chechen War, the Russians improved their information operations, to include hacking into Chechen websites (Thomas 2000, 116-117). Russian and Chechen websites continue their information warfare campaigns as this conflict evolves. Russian mimicry and continued attacks on Chechen websites suggest that the Chechen information warfare campaign has experienced success, however immeasurable it may be.

The Chechen hostage-taking episode in Moscow on 23 October 2002 may have signaled a new level of netwar in this conflict. One day after the hostage seizure, two Chechen website links, [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org) and [www.chechenpress.com](http://www.chechenpress.com), became unavailable. The websites were believed to be silenced by Russian hackers (Bullough

2002). In addition, on 04 November 2002, the Russian Press Ministry issued guidelines for journalists covering emergency situations (Zolotov 2002).

### Summary

This literature review surveyed the available research and findings on the thesis topic. Three areas were discussed: psychosocial aspects of the Internet, the Internet as a tool of information warfare, and the methods of Chechen-sponsored websites during the Russo-Chechen Wars. Below is a summary of the salient points of each topic.

The psychosocial studies of the Internet explain the impact of electronic, internetted communications on society. The resulting virtual communities are uniquely suited to groups like Chechens. The tools of the Internet allow a dispersed group, like the Chechens, to unite, publicize, communicate, and discredit their enemies.

Information warfare studies are gauging the effects of technology on organization and doctrine. The tactics and techniques of digitized communications are increasing the efficiency and planning capabilities of networked organizations, such as Al Qaeda. Online propaganda is another emerging information warfare tactic yet to be fully realized.

Lastly, the Chechen use of the Internet was reviewed. The literature documents the creation of a virtual community geared toward unifying the Chechen cause, discrediting the Russians, and publicizing Chechen views on the conflict.

### Conclusion

The Internet as a tool of information warfare is a field of emerging study. Specific case studies, such as the Chechen use of the Internet, are primarily embedded in broad studies of the conflict. There exists a gap in the study on the design and methods

employed by the Chechens to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict. This thesis aims to capture the current designs and purposes of the websites, thereby documenting the tactics of this emerging area of study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of the study. Discussion of the methodology is organized into the following sections:

1. Review of the purpose of the study
2. Methodology type
3. Design of the study
4. Source of data
5. Instrumentation
6. Data collection procedures and techniques
7. Data analysis plan

#### Purpose of the Study

The explosive growth of the Internet has introduced unique informational implications and organizational changes for the conduct of information warfare. The information warfare template used by the Chechens against the Russians demonstrates the vulnerabilities of large states combating small states where information free flow is the norm. This thesis adds to the body of knowledge on the use of the Internet as a tactic of information warfare. An analysis of how the Chechens are using websites can assist an understanding of the implications of this emerging arena of information warfare.

#### Methodology Type

This is a qualitative study. It uses a descriptive methodology, employing researcher observation of, and interaction with, the websites to gather data.

The descriptive method describes behaviors or conditions (Ledbetter 2000). This method is applicable in examining the Internet, with its shifting data sets and interactive websites. Because the websites are dynamic and contain something akin to a personality, a descriptive methodology is employed to gather data.

#### Design of the Study

The websites were the primary sources of data. This study was conducted using the researcher's personal computer, at home, to connect to the websites. Thus, the nature of the direct observations are via online communications.

Within the websites are communication tools: chat, electronic mail, electronic mail lists, and newsgroups. These tools were used to conduct interactive communications with the webmasters and website users.

#### Source of Data

This study examines three websites. The chosen websites, The Chechen Republic Online, The Chechen Times, and Kavkaz Center, were selected from among numerous websites with a clearly Chechen-based perspective. The Internet sites were selected based on prior studies conducted of Chechen websites (Thomas 2002).

#### Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data (appendix B) was designed by the researcher. The researcher designed the instrument by combining a model for network effectiveness with an instrument for determining website effectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

The instrument is categorized into three levels: narrative, technological, and doctrinal. Each level contains observation criteria in the form of questions that focused the researcher during observation of the website. The instrument was designed to guide

the researcher to cull specific information from the data during observation and interaction with the websites. The thesis question and secondary question were the guides used to develop the observation criteria and questions within each level.

The instrument is designed to ensure that reliable data was produced when the observation criteria were applied to the different websites.

The instrument was built by combining tenets of two separate instruments. The first instrument, Arquilla and Ronfeldt's model for network effectiveness, was used to categorize the data collected into subtopics: narrative level, technological level, and doctrinal level. Within these categories were specific questions designed to gather pertinent data about the websites. The second instrument, a model for evaluating website effectiveness, was employed to capture data specifically displayed on a website. The combination of the two models was employed to gather data that focused on answering the research question.

#### Data Collection Procedures and Techniques

The instrument was employed to gather data by initial observation of the website (X-day). Two follow-up examinations of the websites were conducted to account for changes, updates, or shifts. These were conducted at X+4 and X+10.

During the interaction data gathering portion of the study, the researcher conducted continuous online communications over a thirty-day period. The thirty days allowed for adequate observation of the communication structures and interactions of the population.

For access to electronic mail newsgroups, the researcher employed a duty-free "hotmail" account.

### Data Analysis Plan

The findings are presented in table format for each website. The data are analyzed using the three levels in the instrument: narrative, functional, and doctrinal. Observations gathered outside of these categories are presented at the end of each website narrative.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The presentation and analysis of the data have one section for each website: Chechen Republic Online ([www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com)), The Chechen Times ([www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl)) and Kavkaz Center ([www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org)). Within each section, a table summarizing the website data is provided. Following the table, a detailed analysis is conducted on the narrative, functional, and doctrinal levels. At this point, an analysis is presented on how the website is designed to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict. Finally, a conclusion is given for each website analysis.

#### Chechen Republic Online: [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com)

The Chechen Republic Online was examined on 15 November 2002. The site was subsequently reviewed on 20 November and 25 November 2002. Table 1, Summary of Website Data for [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com), synthesizes the data gathered.

#### Narrative Level

The narrative level of analysis studies stories or expressions of people's beliefs, interests, experiences, and values that communicate a sense of cause, purpose, and mission (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 328).

The stated purpose of this website is "to provide the general public with articles, current news, and social life in Chechnya" (appendix C). Among the evaluated websites, The Chechen Republic Online provides the most thorough, though not necessarily updated, information on Chechnya. The site provides broad information on all aspects of Chechnya--cultural, political, and historical. The principal theme of the website is the

tragedy occurring for the citizens of war torn Chechnya. The predominant subtheme is pursuit of Chechen independence. This subtheme builds support for Chechen independence against a backdrop of Russian aggression. To maintain a balanced appeal, The Chechen Republic Online develops this subtheme subtly, without aggressive posturing that appears provocative or bellicose.

The narrative level is analyzed using six categories: news/articles, photos/images, people, graphics/logos, related links, and language.

News/Articles. The site contains 217 articles, with the largest categories being politics (127), war (71), people (28), and history (15). The articles are collected from worldwide sources and constitute the most informative single database discovered during research. The articles range from political opinion articles to discussions of guerrilla warfare tactics. The articles, in general, present a sympathetic view of Chechens against Russian aggressors.

The site is notably free of jihad-related articles or articles that glorify the Chechen armed struggle against Russia. Of the 217 articles, The Chechen Republic Online posted only one disclaimer. Prior to an article entitled “Friendless Chechens shield Taliban despite vast differences in beliefs” (Hechtman 2002), the website editor states, “We have included this article because it might contain some information of interest to our visitors, however, Chechen Republic does not endorse the views expressed or the facts presented in this article. Read with caution” (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com/war/rusquote.html](http://www.amina.com/war/rusquote.html), 23 October 02). This disclaimer exemplifies the cautious stance of the website regarding Chechen strategies or personalities. Though the website is pro

independence, it refrains from endorsing political figures or specific strategies to win independence.

Table 1. Summary of Website Data for [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com)

	QUESTION	Y/N	DATA
Narrative	Stated Purpose?	Y	Provide public with articles, current news and social life inCh
	News Articles?	Y	210 articles: Politics (127) War (71) People (28) History (15)
	Articles cited?	Y	Reuters, Associated Press, Moscow Times, Wash. Post
	Ed/Op Articles?	Y	41 Ed/Op articles; none from Amina.com staff
	Graphics?	Y	3 colors used on homepage; Chechen ribbon icon
	Audio?	Y	300+ songs from Chechen musical artists
	Video?	N	No video on website; links to Time/NY Times news stories
	Is the site updated?	N	No updates between X-day and X+8
	Various styles/fonts?	N	Arial-like font, size 11 throughout site
	Logos, Banners?	Y	Chechen ribbon displayed on home page, 2"x1"
	History available?	Y	15 articles on Ch. History; no definitive version
	Advertisements?	N	None
	Related site links?	Y	19 links: 7 photo essays, 4 NGO, 3 Russian, 2 mailing list
	Multiple languages?	N	English only
Functional	Internal links?	Y	15 internal links, all active
	Help/Search?	Y	Search website feature and links to 5 search engines
	Leading technology?	Y	XHTML 1.0 Strict, Java Chat
	Compression tech?	Y	Windowsmedia.com plays audio
	URL permanent?	Y	Registered in 1996, unchanged
	Downtime for site?	Y	None observed between X and X+8; was down 1-10 Nov.
	Search Engine Rank	Y	Using "Chechnya," Yahoo #4, MSN #25, Google #2
	ISP identified?	N	Internet Service Provider not identified on site
Doctrinal	Cultural/Rel. Affiliation	Y	Homepage: "Chechnya is a modernmuslim society"
	Recruiting Tool?	N	No overt recruiting tool; BORZIK chat exists for networking
	Fundraising Tool?	Y	Instructions on how to make a donation to help Chechens
	Types of currency?	Y	US& Canada \$, Euros, Lbs, Yen; VISA, MC, AMEX, Discover
	Communication option	Y	Yahoo Chat Group called BORZIK; electronic mailing list
	Networking options?	Y	Chat, links to other groups, Forum
	Actions	N	No explicit actions stated; not dogmatic
Methodology	N	No explicit methodology; philanthropic design for assistance	

The density of the articles and the wide range of sources provide so much information that no single political or strategic position is endorsed. The absence of vitriolic postings or engagement in intra-Chechen politics supports the website's claim that it is a broad source of information on all aspects of Chechnya. Politically, the website is clearly pro-independence, anti-Russian. However, there does not appear to be any endorsement or alignment with any of the Chechen factions competing to direct the country's independence movement.

The news section contains a posting of daily wire stories of interest to Chechens. News stories were posted daily starting December 1994. The last story was posted on 15 May 2002, and none have been posted since. The development of several sophisticated Chechen news websites in the past several years has clearly surpassed the "homemade" news bulletin capability of The Chechen Republic Online. It is likely that given the high quality of alternatives devoted to current news in Chechnya, The Chechen Republic Online discontinued the news postings. Supportive of this conjecture is the presence of links to [www.chechenpress.com](http://www.chechenpress.com), [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl) and [www.chechen.org](http://www.chechen.org). These three sites are devoted to current news on subjects of interest to Chechens.

The news and articles are not updated regularly, and received no visible updates between 15 November and 25 November 2002. Notably, the hostage crisis in Moscow on 23 October 2002, led by Chechen Movsar Barayev, which led to a spike in Chechen news stories worldwide, received no postings from the website. The absence of any posting from the October 2002 hostage crisis suggests that The Chechen Republic Online remains a largely archival database on Chechnya.

Photos/Images. The website contains 112 digital photos and images of refugees, war, ruined cities and villages, victims of combat, rape and torture, homeless children, hospitals, landmine victims, and Chechen fighters. The images of war posted to the site narrate the reality and tragedy of life in Chechnya. The continuous observation of these moving images evokes pity, even rage, at the horrors of war. The images support the subtheme of Chechen independence and Russian aggression. This section of The Chechen Republic Online is very effective in supporting this subpurpose, precisely because the website refrains from obvious propaganda or aggressive stances that bias the user against published photos, stories, or images. The “informative” nature of the website provides the user the opportunity to formulate his own opinion, a tactic that often produces more effect than presenting obviously biased, propaganda-laced media.

The photo collection primarily focuses on the people of Chechnya. The psychological effect is sympathy toward the Chechens and anger toward the Russians. Included in one section of war images are eighteen quotes attributed to Russian soldiers about their hatred for Chechens. One quote reads, “I remember a Chechen female sniper. We just tore her apart using two armored personnel carriers, having tied her ankles with steel cables. There was a lot of blood, but the boys needed it.” (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com/war/rusquote.html](http://www.amina.com/war/rusquote.html), 25 October 02). The technique of interspersing hate-filled quotes with shocking images of dead and mutilated bodies is a powerful media technique. While neither the veracity of the quotes nor the authenticity of the pictures can be readily verified, this method of perception management is designed to stir pity, anger, and revulsion.

Included in the WAR and PEOPLE internal links are digital photos of Chechen soldiers. These photos, some of the best discovered during the research, show the armed, motley-uniformed Chechen fighters. Collectively, the photos narrate the story of life as a Chechen soldier, and portray the fighters--in both photos and text--as brave, bold heroes of the Chechen Republic. Collectively, the photos do not overly romanticize or glorify combat nor do they present a menacing, intimidating story about Chechen soldiers. The section possesses a human interest story feel that lauds the Chechen fighters and their struggles. There are no photos of dead, wounded, or captured Russian soldiers on the site. Overall, the photos do not appear to be included to induce psychological intimidation or fear. Conversely, they demonstrate the ugly, human side of war, its faces and its effects on Chechnya.

In addition to the images of war there are digital photos and scanned pictures of stamps, currency, musical instruments, wolves, traditional costumes, rivers, mountains, cemeteries, and Chechen Army unit patches. The ART link contains thirty digital images of Chechen art, in the form of oil paintings, ceremonial daggers, and wall-hangings. A POSTCARD link offers the option to select among twelve postcards, write a message, and then send it electronically via electronic mail. Again, these sections contribute to the broad, informative nature of the website that allows the “subpurpose” to surface intermittently, without dominating the tone of the website.

The detailed display of Chechen cultural symbols offers a glimpse of Chechnya outside of its decade-long notoriety as a war torn region. This catalog of cultural items provides a human dimension to Chechnya that is unique among the websites analyzed.

This human dimension contributes to the stated purpose of The Chechen Republic Online as a location to learn about all aspects of Chechens.

People. The PEOPLE link is an archive of prominent Chechens. Among the 103 Chechen persons featured, only three are contemporary military figures.<sup>5</sup> Others featured include people of art and science (40), people from history (44), politicians (10) and sportsmen (6). The inclusion of just three Chechen contemporary fighters among more than one hundred prominent Chechens illustrates the website's preference to present a broad scope of all aspects of Chechen life. Again, the choice to de-emphasize Chechen fighters demonstrates how the website design supports the subtle inclusion of the subpurpose.

Graphics/Logos. The Chechen Republic Online does not use sophisticated design concepts or elegant visual elements. The site is visually simplistic, with easy to recognize internal links. The site is uniformly typed in an arial-type font, lending to its feel as a homemade website.

There are no logos, advertisements, banners, or attention-getting monikers. The single graphic on the homepage is a one-by-one inch awareness ribbon, striped in red, white and green, the colors of the Chechen flag. The ribbon is an active link that leads to instructions about how to donate money to help Chechnya.

That the lone graphic is an awareness ribbon gives the introduction of the website a philanthropic, human rights-oriented sentiment. Again, the website is effective in connecting its human element with its subpurpose of supporting Chechen independence against Russian aggression.

Related Links. The Chechen Republic Online contains eighteen external links to the Internet. Eight links are to photo journals and photo essays produced by western news agencies, such as *Time Magazine* and the *New York Times* (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com/links/](http://www.amina.com/links/)). These photo essays corroborate the narrative themes of website through the eyes of western journalists, thereby bolstering the credibility of the website.

Three links are to nongovernmental organizations (NGO) supportive of Chechens. The NGO links are to Human Rights Watch, Prague Watchdog, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Assistance Group. These links assist in the “swarming” effect of collating transnational, social activists to aid the Chechen cause. The NGO links illustrate the attempt to network external activists whose collective influence assists with public relations, communication, and coordination among like-minded NGOs. Transnational networking is one of the most powerful social tools offered by the Internet (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 61-97). The NGO links provided by The Chechen Republic Online demonstrate a fostering of this form of electronic congregation.

Three links are provided to other Chechen websites, primarily those which are news oriented, to include The Chechen Times ([www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl)). Absent from the external links are connections to more bellicose Chechen sites located at [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org) and [www.qoqaz.net](http://www.qoqaz.net). Both of these websites are openly supportive of Chechen militancy and both are vehemently anti-Russian. The absence of links to the more aggressive, provocative Chechen websites denotes a deliberate choice to refrain from direct networking with those website users.

Language. The Chechen Republic Online is published in English only. The one exception is the CHAT forum which, formerly introduced in English, is now presented in the Chechen language.<sup>6</sup>

Among websites examined, The Chechen Republic Online is the only site that is published only in English. This has two implications. First, the English only format suggests that the website's main audience is outside of the theatre of conflict, and is predominately western. The Chechen Republic Online's avoidance of bellicose themes and appeals for human rights further indicate that the message of the website is attuned to western audiences that, presumably, value human rights and support the right of self-determination.

Secondly, the English only format accommodates the unification of the Chechen diaspora across the world, as Chechnya attempts to secure assistance and support from abroad. In particular, citizens from developed, democratic nations can become informed of the conflict through the eyes of Chechens themselves. The ability to tell the story of Chechens from the "inside" and convey it to the world "outside" is a key component of gaining or maintaining international support.

#### Functional Level

The functional level of analysis describes the design of the website and its ability to deliver information consistently in a practical, user friendly manner. The functional level is discussed in two categories: website layout and technical attributes.

Website Layout. The Chechen Republic Online is a well-organized, user friendly site that contains vast amounts of information that is readily accessible. The homepage lists fifteen internal links: HOME, ARTICLES, LANGUAGE, NEWS, WAR, IMAGES,

MAPS, ART, AUDIO, POSTCARD, PEOPLE, FORUM, CHAT, LINKS, and SEARCH.

All the internal links are active. This simple design allows access to specific categories quickly.

There are no complicated graphics or true originality of display. Thus, there is no attention clash when searching for information or browsing a link. This simple, functional design conveys a homemade feel, versus a professional feel. The website layout resembles the work of a small, dedicated team with limited resources and little outside professional assistance.

Technical Attributes. In search engine results, [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com) was the best among the three evaluated websites (table 2). The Chechen Republic Online's competitive positioning in search engine results gives the website excellent visibility among users seeking information on Chechnya.

Table 2. Search Engine positioning results using search word "Chechnya"

Website	Search Engine		
	YAHOO	MSN	Google
Amina.com	4	25	2
Chechnya.nl	15	90	12
Kavkaz.org	261	123	260

The URL, [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com), has been registered and copyrighted since 1996.

There was no observed downtime for the site between 15 November 2002 and 25 November 2002.

The site SEARCH function contains both an intra-site search capability and a search link to the World Wide Web. The links to five external search engines are All the

Web, Google, Vivisimo, Teoma, and Yahoo. This feature is useful to enable the user to continue searching for topics or updates that are not available on amina.com.

The Chechen Republic Online employs a copyrighted HTML validation service, called W3C Validator. The document type is XHTML 1.0 Strict, which provides excellent backward and forward compatibility for Web users. Java Chat is used for the Chat function.

The Internet Service Provider is not specified on the site. No phone, fax, electronic mail addresses or contact numbers are provided for the site administrator. The anonymity of the publishers of The Chechen Republic Online throughout the site is reinforced by the absence of a “contact us” section. This choice allows the publishers of The Chechen Republic Online to post information freely without having to identify themselves or their location.

Technically, the website is well-structured and employs current technologies. Despite this observation, the design and content choices of the website retain the “homemade” appeal that is consistent with the narrative strategies employed by The Chechen Republic Online.

#### Doctrinal Level

The doctrinal level of analysis studies the mechanisms or doctrines that encourage and enable members to organize and act according to common rules, principles, or tactics (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001). The doctrinal level of The Chechen Republic Online was analyzed using three categories: affiliation, fundraising, and communication options.

Affiliation. The website homepage cites no official affiliation and, in fact, pointedly separates itself from the government of Chechnya. The introduction to the website states:

Chechen Republic Online website is developed by the team of people, devoted to Chechnya. Originally it was monitored by the Government of the Chechen Republic, but not any longer...Chechnya is a modern Muslim society and Chechens have very strong respect for old people. Chechens are the best friends and the worst enemies. The guest is a sacred person for the Chechen. Therefore, friendship is appreciated as highly as readiness to help those who are weak or needy (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com), 17 September 2002).

The absence of affiliation with the Chechen government or other Chechen groups keeps the website broadly focused on the people of Chechnya and their quest for independence. By classifying themselves as “a team of people, devoted to Chechnya,” the publishers refrain from endorsing specific political or strategic options.

The introductory statement identifying Chechnya as a “modern muslim society” is the most definitive statement of affiliation provided by the website. This statement corroborates the strong cultural and religious narrative of the website.

The absence of jihad or Islamic fundamentalist related references indicates a clear choice not to associate the website with these more radical movements.

Overall, the broad affiliation defined by the website presents no obvious doctrine or path of action to be taken by its followers. The most demonstrable suggestion for action from the website is to assist Chechens by donating funds.

Fundraising. The awareness ribbon icon posted on the homepage provides a connection to a fundraising option. The Chechen Republic Online employs a copyrighted, electronic collection agency called PAYPAL to process monetary donations (appendix C). PAYPAL converts donations from U.S. dollars, Canadian dollars, British pounds,

Japanese yen, and euros. The website provides a one page explanation on their fundraising program (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com/help/](http://www.amina.com/help/), 22 October 2002).

The Chechen Republic Online explains that funds are sent through private sources from the USA to Chechnya and sent to people “in a state of starvation” who need the help most. Additionally, the site states that “some amount of donations will be directed toward changing the ‘negative public image’ which has been created and fostered by the Russians” (Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com/help/](http://www.amina.com/help/), 22 October 2002). This explanation about how The Chechen Republic Online distributes its donations is concurrent with the human rights sentiment of the website. Among the Chechen websites analyzed, The Chechen Republic Online is clearly most interested in presenting a positive public image. Thus, the statement that some donations are used to counter a negative public image indicates that The Chechen Republic Online might well be the beneficiary of a portion of the donations.

The inclusion of a fundraising option is critical in that it offers a path of action to influence the Russo-Chechen war. Website users can provide real-time assistance to the Chechens through donations, presuming that the donations reach their intended beneficiaries.

Communication Option. The Chechen Republic Online provides two interactive communication options: chat and electronic mail groups.

“Amina Chat” offers users the option to enter into electronic chat rooms and interface with other site users. There are twelve separate rooms within Amina Chat. Amina Chat has posted protocols regarding the use of the chatrooms. The moderator

statement at the introduction to the forum states, “Imagine if your grandfather would be sitting next to you when you talk to others” ([Chechen Republic Online, http://groups.yahoo.com/group/borzik](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/borzik), 19 October 2002). The chat link instructions, initially published in English, were changed to the Chechen language on or about 01 December 2002.

The chat function provides Chechen Republic Online users the option to make contact with other users. This feature is critical in helping unite the Chechen diaspora. Furthermore, chat offers a readily available meeting place for anyone, worldwide, who wishes to meet, reunite, or organize others with the same interests. The networking and communication options offered by Amina Chat are a great benefit to Chechens, who may be denied sanctuaries for safe meetings.

The electronic mail group is titled “Borzik: Chechen Forum.” Established as a “Yahoo! Groups” electronic mailing list, the user is required to join the group to receive electronic mails. According to the group homepage, the Yahoo! Group “Borzik” was founded on 19 March 2002 and contains 454 members. The webpage states that this electronic mail group was established from a group that existed from 1995 to 1999.

The electronic mail list is active. In a thirty-day period from 26 November 2002 to 25 December 2002, the electronic mail group contained eighty-five electronic mail messages from group participants (appendix C). The majority of the electronic mail was social in nature. Only one of the eighty-five postings discussed taking direct action on behalf of Chechens. A member identifying himself as a Pakistani included in his electronic mail, “I like them [Chechens] a lot...firstly they r Muslims and they are also very brave. I want to have friendship with them. If u r Chechen then CAN U PLZ ADD ME in UR MSN PLZ?” The electronic mail (appendix C) is signed off with “1 of the

great fan of MOV SAR BARAYEV and HIS TEAM” referring to the slain Chechen leader who conducted the siege on a Moscow theater on 23 October 2002.

This particular mail message received no public response in the electronic mail group. The electronic mail forum, however, demonstrates an active network of Chechens and others interested in the Chechen situation. The electronic mail forum provides group members connectivity to discuss the affairs of Chechnya openly. Conversely, correspondence can be done privately, as once a user posts his message to the group site, his or her electronic mail address is available to all members of the group. In addition to Amina Chat, the Borzik electronic mail group provides an initial meeting place for like-minded users to congregate. Though the majority of electronic mails were social in nature, the example of one member seeking to actively assist Chechens demonstrates the capability of this communication option.

#### Conclusion

The Chechen Republic Online is a well structured, easily navigable website that aims to provide a positive public image of Chechens and their pursuit of independence. The principal narrative of the website is the tragedy and injustice that the Chechen crisis has created for the citizens of Chechnya. The main subtheme is the pursuit of Chechen independence against the Russians.

The Chechen Republic Online focuses on the broader themes of social injustice and independence by populating its website with articles, stories, images, and icons. Thus, the site communicates the culture, lives, struggles, and problems of the Chechen people. The website presents a portrait of Chechnya that provokes sympathetic responses from its users. Published only in English, the stories, photos, and images of the tragedies

are the type of material that western readers, with their strong regard for universal human rights, find objectionable.

The Chechen Republic Online refrains from advocating specific Chechen political groups, warlords, personalities, or strategies. Additionally, the website largely refrains from jihad-related, militant literature. The site communicates the tragedy of the Chechen situation without provocative overtones or openly militant gestures against Russians. The Chechen Republic Online provides the user sufficient material to draw his own conclusions regarding Chechnya, giving the website a balanced, wide appeal. The website cleverly builds a subtle, convincing case for independence by conveying the impossibility of the situation for today's Chechens.

The website provides communication and fundraising options that allow users to become directly involved in the Chechen cause.

The Chechen Republic Online possesses a homemade feel that supports its contention of "a team of people, devoted to Chechnya." This design aids its sub purpose of building a convincing case for independence against the aggressor, Russia. The Chechen Republic Online is a technically sound, functionally smart website that conveys strong messages about the Russo-Chechen Wars, while maintaining a humane orientation.

#### The Chechen Times: [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl)

The Chechen Times was examined on 16, 20 and 26 November 2002. Table 3, Summary of Website Data for [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl), synthesizes the data gathered.

Narrative Level

The Chechen Times is a daily news website, devoted to the collection and publication of news, features, and opinions about Chechnya. The site opened as the The Chechen Times on 24 October 2002, citing itself as the “first Chechen periodical to appear in Europe” (The Chechen Times, [www.ichkeria.org/index\\_en.html](http://www.ichkeria.org/index_en.html) 24 October 2002). The Chechen Times is carried on a server in The Netherlands.

The Chechen Times is the most politically focused, intellectually oriented of the websites analyzed. The website attempts to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict by providing a Chechen-centric information source that promotes Chechen self-determination against Russia. The narrative level of The Chechen Times is presented in three categories: format, news/articles, and language.

Format. The website is formatted in a professional, easy-to-scan design (appendix D). The title of the site, The Chechen Times, is written in old English font, giving the website a traditional cover that is familiar to western newspaper audiences. Also on the title bar is the statement, “Under the auspices of the Chechen Democratic Association.” No other information is given on the nature, composition, or purpose of the Chechen Democratic Association on the website.

The site consists of one main page from which all articles can be accessed. The titles of the articles are the active links, with the date and source listed underneath. The articles are categorized into sections under the following headings: News, Comments, Genocide, Commentary, Analysis, Opinion, Interview, Refugees, People, and Letters. The site highlights three to four stories per issue by adding one square inch photos or pictures next to the article and posting the opening paragraph of the article. There are no advertisements. The design of the Chechen Times website is simple, professional, and

supports the news only orientation of the site. The format is absent of any cultural or religious iconography, conforming to the format style most used by western news publications. Overall, the website format conveys professionalism, legitimacy, and publishing experience.

News/Articles. The site contains an average of 38.3 articles daily, taken from national and international sources or from readers and contributors.<sup>7</sup> The News, Comments, Genocide, and Refugee sections comprise the majority of the articles and are updated daily.

Table 3. Summary of Website Data for [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl)

	QUESTION	Y/N	DATA
Narrative	Stated Purpose?	N	None
	News Articles?	Y	32 stories: News (18), Comment (11), Other (3)
	Articles cited?	Y	Chechen Times, <i>The Guardian</i> , <i>Moscow Times</i> , <i>NY Times</i>
	Ed/Op Articles?	Y	11 Ed/Op articles
	Graphics?	Y	Desktop publishing style for newsletter
	Audio?	N	None
	Video?	N	None
	Is the site updated?	Y	Updated Daily with wire stories, comments, letters
	Various styles/fonts?	Y	Title is old English font; news stories in Arial-like news font
	Logos, Banners?	Y	Chechen Democratic Association logo at top of webpage
	History available?	N	No definitive history
	Advertisements?	N	None
	Related site links?	N	No links to other sites
	Multiple languages?	Y	Russian and English
Functional	Internal links?	Y	Links to articles, past issues, and feedback electronic mail link
	Help/Search?	Y	Internal Search only
	Leading technology?	Y	HTML Document, Hyper Text Transfer Protocol
	Compression tech?	N	None
	URL permanent?	Y	Started October 24, 2002
	Downtime for site?	N	None observed between Nov. 15 and Nov. 27
	Search Engine Rank	Y	Using "Chechnya," Yahoo #15, MSN #90, Google #12
	ISP identified?	N	Internet Service Provider (Netherlands) not identified

Doctrinal	Cultural/Rel. Affiliation	Y	"Under auspices of the Chechen Democratic Association"
	Recruiting Tool?	N	None
	Fundraising Tool?	N	None
	Types of currency?	N	Not applicable
	Communication?	Y	Feedback link offers electronic mail option to publishers
	Networking options?	N	None
	Actions	Y	Editorials/Commentary suggest positions/actions to take
	Methodology	N	No explicit methodology

Selected letters, analysis, and commentary pieces remain on the site, unchanged, for longer periods. For example, a letter published in *The Boston Globe* by a Chechen doctor lamenting the violence of the Russo-Chechen Wars remained on the site for more than ten days (Baiev 2002).

The news stories are compiled from a compendium of international sources, to include *The Chechen Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Moscow Times*, and *Human Rights Watch*. The news and articles cover political, social, military, and international stories concerning Chechnya. The wire stories themselves are not necessarily overtly pro-Chechen or anti-Russian. However, the sum total of the news and articles unmistakably promote a positive image of Chechens and a negative image of Russians.

The Commentary, Opinion, and Analysis sections contain openly pro-independence, anti-Russian pieces from the editors, contributors and readers of *The Chechen Times*. These opinion and editorial pieces are generally well written, informed, and passionate writings about Russo-Chechen relations. These writings confront political issues, policy debates, legal problems, and other issues that involve the struggle for

Chechen independence. The articles do not advocate violence or terror. Though the website is not “anti-war,” its main focus is on the international, political, and diplomatic issues that affect Chechnya.

The most notable increase in topics on the website during the period covered concerned the public relations problems of Chechens. The deteriorating public perception of Chechens, particularly since the Moscow hostage crisis on 23 October 2002, is reflected in the number of articles devoted to Chechen public images or “terrorist” ties. On 16 November 2002, six articles contained material related to Chechen public images. Ten days later, on 26 November 2002, there were twelve articles covering the topic. Thus, The Chechen Times serves both as a measure of trends in Chechen news and as a forum to combat negative portrayals of Chechens in the media.

The news and articles contained in The Chechen Times website constitute an information set designed to publicize and promote Chechen independence desires. The website provides daily updates on Chechen issues, while promoting Chechen independence as a legitimate and rightful objective.

Language. The Chechen Times is published in Russian, with an English language option. The dual language format indicates that the targeted audience for the website is Russians, Chechens, and English-speakers. This Russo-English language format has two implications.

First, the Russian language option demonstrates the desire to publicize a Chechen political voice inside the area of conflict. The Chechen Times, operating from The Netherlands, posts its version of news on the Web daily, giving uncensored access to media stories and opinions to anyone connected to the Internet. This capability means

that exiled or expatriated Chechens have the capability to influence the political process in Moscow or Grozny without being present in those areas. This is one effective means to bypass Russian attempts to control the media (Zolotov 2002). Additionally, it provides a voice to Chechens who may otherwise be denied the sanctuary to conduct media operations anathema to Russian information campaigns.

Second, the English language option reaches the greatest population of Internet users. Like The Chechen Republic Online, The Chechen Times publishes its news and opinions in a tone and manner consistent with western media practices. As Chechnya faces increasing public relations challenges, providing Chechen-centric news in a format familiar to western audiences is a clever choice. Chechen information platforms such as The Chechen Times aim to combat the negative images of Chechens as part of the legitimization of the independence movement.

#### Functional

The Chechen Times is a simple, efficient site with a professional appeal. The site contains just three internal links: search, feedback, and archive. The search feature is internal to the website only. The feedback mechanism allows the user to electronic mail the publishers of The Chechen Times. The archive link allows past issues to be accessed. Notably, only the current month archive is available. Past months issues of The Chechen Times are currently not retrievable.

There are no external links, audio, video, or help options. There are no complicated graphic designs or interactive media. There was no observed “downtime” for the site. The Chechen Times contains poor accessibility for users seeking information on Chechnya. The URL, [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl), was formerly [www.ichkeria.org](http://www.ichkeria.org) (now defunct).

The search engine results for The Chechen Times still reflect the former URL on Google, MSN, and Yahoo search engines, thus confusing the path to the website.

Functionally, The Chechen Times is uniformly devoted to provide current news about Chechnya. The absence of external links, databases, or communication options indicates the strategic and editorial intent is to remain strictly Chechen news oriented.

#### Doctrinal

The Chechen Times affiliates with the “Chechen Democratic Association.” Neither the website nor the Chechen Democratic Association receives any explanation of purpose, mission, or composition. Thus, no stated doctrine, principle, or tactic is explicitly espoused by the website. Based on the website content and design, the guiding principle of the website appears to be Chechen pro-independence. The site’s focus on current Chechen news and analysis implies belief in the impact of information dissemination, political participation, and international influence.

The Chechen Times contains no religious or cultural affiliation other than its complete focus on Chechen current events. There are no attempts to raise funds, recruit, or network. There are no links to outside sources and there are no communication options other than the publisher “feedback” electronic mail option. Again, this highlights the site’s singular goal to provide daily news feeds from international sources and editorial comments relating to Chechnya.

The Chechen Times promotes its pro independence stance through the publication of news, articles, and persuasive writings about the crisis in Chechnya. The website attempts to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict by providing a Chechen-centric information source that promotes Chechen self-determination against Russia.

## Conclusion

The Chechen Times is singularly focused on providing current news and articles concerning Chechnya. This focus indicates the value that the publishers place on information dissemination and the political process. The website posits a pro-Chechen, anti-Russian stance through the collection of news from credible sources and articles from well informed contributors.

The website is a barometer of Chechen current issues. The increased concern with the public image of Chechens is documented in the articles and demonstrates the website's attempt to address the issue in a manner favorable to the Chechen cause. The Russo-English language format shows the intent to influence audiences both inside and outside of the area of conflict. The website is professional, efficient, and contains a secular, western appeal.

Kavkaz Center: [www.kavkazcenter.com](http://www.kavkazcenter.com)

The third and final website, Kavkaz Center, is the most antagonistic and controversial of the evaluated sites. The website itself is something of a fugitive, appearing, disappearing, and reappearing from the Internet at irregular intervals. Kavkaz Center was not accessible during the data collection period of this study and, therefore, is not evaluated consistent with the evaluation instrument applied to The Chechen Republic Online ([www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com)) and The Chechen Times ([www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl)). Instead, the analysis of Kavkaz Center discusses how and why the site continues to be targeted for removal from the Internet.

The Kavkaz Center data are presented in three sections. First, a background of Kavkaz Center is presented, including the website goals and purpose. Next, the dispute

over the publication of the website is discussed. Lastly, the operation of the website during the 23 October 2002 Moscow theatre hostage crisis is analyzed.

#### Kavkaz Center Background and Description

Kavkaz Center was established in 1999 in Istanbul by former Chechen Foreign Minister Movladi Udogov (Eichrodt 1999). Udogov is largely credited with operating a successful information campaign during the First Chechen War that turned public opinion against the Russians. Operating as an “unofficial” Chechen website since its inception, Kavkaz Center is published in English, Russian, and Arabic, and has reportedly appeared in Ukrainian, Swedish, and Finnish (Russian Regional Report 2000). The site demonstrated its popularity when, in September 1999, the Kavkaz Center ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in Russia, based on a search engine list of Russia’s top 100 Internet sites (Eichrodt 2000 and Thomas 2000).

Kavkaz Center is a notoriously aggressive, pro-Islam, anti-Russian website that publishes Chechen propaganda. The information provided by Kavkaz Center is generally rooted in fact, making the site a key source for information on Chechnya. Russian strict media controls in Chechnya create an information environment eager for “other than Russian” news from Chechnya. Kavkaz Center publishes news, stories, and views that are not filtered by Russian officials. Thus, these stories often counter the Russian version of events. Kavkaz Center stories contain frequent references to Islam, often use slurs to characterize Russians, and employ sarcasm, emotion, and exaggeration in conveying news. Following are four examples of the reporting methods and styles employed by Kavkaz Center

1. Kavkaz Center contains a psywar component, and has posted photos, videos, and footage of Russian dead and prisoners (Russian Regional Report 2000 and Krushelnycky 2000). To this end, the website has been used as a mouthpiece for rebel actions, and is often the first source of information that explains significant acts in the war. Specifically, in May 2000, Russians were forced to admit Chechen involvement in the shooting down of a Russian SU-24 jet when the website posted photos of rebels holding parts of the plane's wreckage (Krushelnycky 2000). This report aimed to expose Russian officials as perpetrators of misinformation.

2. In August 2000, the Russian nuclear submarine *Kursk* mysteriously sank in the North Sea. Kavkaz Center claimed that the sinking was an act of sabotage performed by Dagestani crew members acting on behalf of Chechen rebels (Daly 2000). The news story led to a Russian investigation into the claim. The claim could not be categorically disproved because the entire crew of the *Kursk* perished inside the crippled submarine. This example shows the effectiveness of a simple threat. Whether fabricated or real, the sabotage story generated the possibility of Chechen involvement in this episode that proved internationally embarrassing to the Russian government.

3. In April 2002, the website confirmed the death of Arab warlord Khattab who died from handling a poisoned letter sent by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) (Janes Intelligence Watch Report 2002). This demonstrated an attempt to expose the unconventional, if not illegal, methods of assassination employed by the Russians against the Chechens.

4. The rebels used the website as a broadcast platform to claim responsibility for the 23 October 2002 Moscow theater siege. This example (detailed on pages 51-53)

demonstrates the impact of direct communication amidst a crisis. The Web allows near real-time communication that can directly influence the interpretation and outcome of a crisis situation.

These four examples illustrate the various ways that Kavkaz Center has contrived to influence the information component of the war.

Kavkaz Center provides extensive links to jihad-related material and websites. Currently, there are ninety links to websites, the majority devoted to Islamic organizations. Among these links are Taliban Online, Azzam, Al-Jazeera, Islam Online, Jihad Unspun, US Crusade, Pentagon Lies and Muslaman. Like Amina.com, Kavkaz Center is designed to facilitate the network of like-minded users. The links aid the gathering of like-minded users, aiding in the establishment of a virtual community.

For all its advantages, active networking among Islamists also has its drawbacks. The alignment of Kavkaz Center with radical Islamic organizations has placed the website and the government of Chechnya under increased pressure and scrutiny since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks (Bullough 2002).

#### Disputing the Publication of Kavkaz Center

Originally established in Istanbul, Turkey, Kavkaz Center has been forced to constantly relocate in order to remain accessible. Russian hackers attacked the site in August 1999, only to find the site operating from a US server within one week (Eichrodt 2000). This caused the Russian Interior Ministry to pressure the US to deny the rebels access to US servers. This pressure, coupled with an Internet media blitz against the site orchestrated by Russian computer programmers, aided the evolution of the website into its current fugitive-like state (Eichrodt 2000 and Jane's Intelligence Watch Report 2002).

The 23 October 2002 Moscow theater siege by Chechen rebels initiated a renewed, coordinated attack on Kavkaz Center. The day following the siege, Russian hackers collapsed Kavkaz Center and [www.chechenpress.com](http://www.chechenpress.com) by cyber attacks. The attacks were confirmed by the operators of the US-registered sites (Bullough 2002). The commercial host of the site, Verisign Inc., also confirmed involvement in the developing situation. A Verisign Inc. spokesman stated, “The site is frozen. Currently the site is in dispute.” Kavkaz Center quickly moved to a new address, but remained under electronic attack (Bullough 2002). Access to the site remains unpredictable.

This situation illustrates the development of the “cyber front” in information warfare. Given the virtual nature of the Internet, targeting the information source requires a mixture of technical, diplomatic, and legal actions to be effective. In the US, civil liberties issues are at stake, further complicating the problem. Despite the multi-front attack on the site, Kavkaz Center remained accessible at the time of this writing (appendix E).

#### Effects of Netwar: Kavkaz Center and the Moscow Theater Siege

The 23 October 2002 Moscow theater siege, led by Chechen rebel Movsar Barayev, resulted in the capture of more than 700 theater attendees and cast members. The standoff ended three days later when Russian security forces gassed the theater, then stormed inside to free the hostages. Forty-one rebels and 128 hostages were killed.

The seizure of the theater immediately sparked widespread rumor and speculation about the facts of the situation. On the first day of the crisis, Kavkaz Center had direct contact with Barayev’s accomplices. Kavkaz Center postings provided breaking details about the situation (from a Chechen viewpoint) while simultaneously publicizing the

demands from the hostage takers (Brandenberger 2002 and researcher access to Kavkaz Center, [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org), 24 October 2002). On the second day of the crisis, 24 October 2002, Kavkaz Center and several other Chechen-sponsored websites were silenced (Brandenberger 2002). The next day, amid rumors of hostage executions (now believed untrue), the building was stormed.

The episode caused an enormous public backlash against Chechens. The Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, condemned the act and professed his innocence. However, the public relations crisis worsened, indicting the entire Chechen leadership. Amidst this development, Kavkaz Center resurfaced. On 01 November 2002, Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev posted a statement on Kavkaz Center, claiming responsibility for the siege. Shrewdly, Basayev absolved President Maskhadov of any knowledge of the seizure, and asked the President to accept his resignation from all posts except commander of the Riyadus-Salikhin battalion (BBC monitoring of Kavkaz Center, 01 November 2002). Though the merit of the claim is unknown, Kavkaz Center acted as the conduit for the Chechen factions to, at once, assign and absolve responsibility for the siege.

This episode shows the impact that the website had on the publicity of a specific act of war, or terror. By acting as a broadcast platform for the Barayev hostage taking team, Kavkaz Center aligned itself with his plot. Days later, when the public backlash was mounting, the website published Shamil Basayev's explanation of events. Basayev's attempt to assign responsibility (psychological impact) and concurrently absolve Maskdahov (damage control) sought to manipulate the information component of the siege.

## Kavkaz Center: Analysis

The case study of Kavkaz Center provides insightful observations concerning Russo-Chechen Internet-based information warfare. The following three observations are analyzed: (1) publicity does not guarantee positive effects; (2) commercial internet service providers are part of the cyber “front;” and (3) provocative websites are prone to attacks.

Publicity does not guarantee positive effects. The popularity and wide exposure of Kavkaz Center is evident in the wire stories, articles, and television sources that frequently quote the website. Additionally, the consistency of attacks on the website demonstrates that Kavkaz Center is a target of some importance to the Russians. However, the ubiquity of a website does not necessarily translate into tactical or strategic successes. The reliance on psywar tactics and emotive propaganda, while effective in some areas, damages the Chechens in their increasingly difficult battle to portray themselves as legitimate statesmen. The benefits of psywar tactics often countermand Chechen claims for credibility, legitimacy, and due process.

Commercial internet service providers are part of the “cyber front.” The conflict surrounding the publication of controversial websites like Kavkaz Center is centered on the host of the site, also called the Internet service provider. The marginally regulated industry of internet hosting, domains, and servers constitutes an emerging front on the information battlefield. While the information itself is virtual, and can be created anywhere, the dissemination of that information requires a host server. The US, with its strong emphasis on free speech, allows liberal use of the Internet to traffic information. Subsequently, Kavkaz Center has found refuge in the US, for now. The hosts of sites like

Kavkaz Center face increasing scrutiny, restrictions and even danger, as this cyber front expands.

Provocative websites are prone to attacks. Kavkaz Center remains a fugitive site because it engages in open, aggressive information warfare against the Russians. Despite the drawbacks of its violence-laced propaganda, Kavkaz Center broadcasts a Chechen view of events that attacks the credibility and veracity of Russian accounts of the conflict. The case study of the Moscow theater raid shows that violence and derring-do warrants attention. The magnitude of that attention and the potential for Chechen exploitation of the situation thus generated the cyber attacks.

Kavkaz Center's active involvement in psywar has gained it a level of notoriety that runs counter to Russian goals to control information concerning Chechnya. Thus, Kavkaz Center is targeted. Many pro-Chechen, anti-Russian sites exist that are not targeted, simply because they do not posit the confrontational stance of Kavkaz Center.

#### Summary

Chapter 4 analyzed the results of the data gathered on the three websites. The findings showed that each website employed a unique design to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict.

The Chechen Republic Online posits a cultural orientation with a great emphasis on the human tragedy in war torn Chechnya. This website effectively communicates the tragedy of the Chechen situation without provocative overtones or openly militant gestures against Russians. The Chechen Republic Online builds a subtle, convincing case for independence by conveying the impossibility of the situation for today's Chechens. The site operates active fundraising, communicating, and networking options.

The Chechen Times is singularly focused on providing current news and articles concerning Chechnya. The website aims for broad information dissemination and legitimate involvement in the international political process. The Chechen Times posits a pro-independence, anti-Russian stance through the collection of news from credible sources and articles from well-informed contributors. The website contains analysis of current issues concerning Chechnya in a manner favorable to the Chechen cause. The Chechen Times is professional, efficient, and contains a secular, western appeal.

The Kavkaz Center is an Islamic, anti-Russian and anti-western website that employs propaganda and psywar techniques to support its violent strategy for an independent Chechen state. The website provides extensive networking options as a means to unite like-minded supporters of independence. Kavkaz Center provides direct communications and information postings of Chechen actions in the field. The website's aggressive posture and its alignment with the most radical Chechen warlords have earned it the attention of Russian officials and hackers. Kavkaz Center remains in a fugitive-like state, intent on continuing to publish its view of the Russo-Chechen conflict.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions, implications of the study, and recommendations for further study. A summary of the entire thesis paper concludes the chapter.

#### Conclusions

The thesis question asked: How are the Chechen-sponsored websites designed to influence the Russo-Chechen Wars? The analysis was limited to three of a potential twelve websites. The analysis of the data produced four conclusions. Each conclusion is listed below, then further developed under the conclusion subheading.

1. Chechen subgroups use the Internet differently for a common goal.
2. Chechen websites provide the means to raise funds, communicate, mobilize, and unite.
3. Chechen websites are platforms for information dissemination for groups denied a sanctuary.
4. Chechen websites are used as a broadcast tool for rebel field actions, political stances and explanation of events.

#### Use the Internet Differently for a Common Goal

Each of the three websites seeks the same end: Chechen independence. However, the design of each website reflects different techniques for achieving that end. The Chechen Republic Online breeds familiarity with the Chechen culture, ultimately generating sorrow for the Chechens, and anger at the Russians. The website produces this

effect without a provocative attitude that might bias the browser against the veracity of the information. The Chechen Times, with its all-news format, focuses on information dissemination, Chechen political stories, and studied commentary. The website aims for the legitimate political representation of Chechen issues in a professional, secular manner. Kavkaz Center employs propaganda and intimidation in its jihad oriented website. Whereas the first two websites seek legitimacy with western audiences, Kavkaz Center, with its aggressive bulletins and pro-Islamic reporting, conveys antagonism to western audiences. The three websites employ different Internet capabilities and designs to achieve a common end: Chechen independence.

#### A Means to Raise Funds, Communicate, Mobilize, and Unite

The Chechens are employing the Internet to raise funds, communicate, mobilize, and unite; with each website devoted to one or more of these issues. The Chechen websites provide a rallying point and fertile ground for Chechens to conduct activities supportive of independence. The Chechen Republic Online contains sophisticated, active fundraising, and communication options to unite the Chechen diaspora. The Chechen Times provides a conduit for current Chechen information, both inside and outside of Chechnya. Kavkaz Center seeks to unite and mobilize Islamists in pursuit of Chechen independence. Kavkaz Center also operates as a mouthpiece for the public announcement of Chechen field actions. Together, these capabilities demonstrate the development of networked forms of organization.

#### Information Dissemination Platforms for Threatened Groups

The Internet provides a safe haven for threatened organizations and individuals to communicate. The Russian threat has forced Chechen resistance groups to congregate

outside of Chechnya. The three websites examined are using the Internet as an information dissemination tool. Given the ubiquity of the Internet, the low cost to access it, and the ease of creating Web based interfaces, the Internet is an optimum locale to gain informational advantages over one's adversary. The Chechen presence on the Internet verifies the emerging significance of using Web based services.

#### A Broadcast Tool for Rebel Actions and Explanations

The Internet, and websites specifically, is used as a broadcast platform for Chechen rebels. Given their limited access to traditional forms of media (radio, television, and newspaper), Chechen leaders are using the Internet's speed to communicate intent, actions, and reactions. Kavkaz Center's direct broadcasting of statements from the Moscow theater hostage raiders demonstrates this usage. This form of information dissemination reaches a wide audience immediately, thereby allowing the Chechens to better manage perceptions. In the case of the theater raid, this type of Internet usage led to the silencing of the website. It is fair to conclude that openly employing the Internet to aid the effects of field actions increases the risk that the website will be targeted.

#### Implications

This study provides implications for the future understanding of Internet usage in wartime. There are three key implications to consider as this form of warfare evolves: outgunned groups will leverage the capabilities of the Internet, combating Internet-based operations has civil rights implications, and the US will face increasingly networked adversaries.

Given these implications, what is the future of Internet usage in wartime?

The Internet will afford groups the ability to orchestrate their information warfare efforts against any and all adversaries, supporters, or targeted populations. Groups that can orchestrate their information warfare tactics via the Internet will be maximizing this low cost, ubiquitous communication medium to their advantage. This might involve webpage creation, advertisements, clandestine communications, or the ability to mobilize and “swarm” quickly to influence a developing situation. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that soon Internet attacks will trigger hostilities, in the manner that a border violation or treaty abrogation often spark high-intensity conflict between adversaries. As electronic networks increasingly take the place of hierarchical organizational structures, the network itself will be a decisive point in defeating one’s enemy.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

The use of the Internet to influence the Russo-Chechen Wars contains many aspects not developed in this limited study. To further develop the body of research on this topic, three areas are suggested: (1) study the effects of the Internet on the Russo-Chechen conflict; (2) study the changes in the Chechen websites as the conflict matures; and (3) broaden the study to include both Chechen and Russian websites, particularly those not published in English.

A further area of research might catalog the development of websites from insurgent or terrorist groups, worldwide, to determine the growth and potential impact of this tactic. Websites among African insurgent groups (Reuters 2002) and terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda (Hosenball 2003) provide interesting and useful topics for further study.

## Summary

The results of this research illustrate how three Chechen-sponsored websites attempt to influence the Russo-Chechen conflict. The study methodology employed an instrument to describe the design, content, and behavior of the websites. The data were analyzed employing the prior research outlined in the literature review. Two websites were analyzed according to this methodology. The third website, by virtue of its unavailability for study, required a different analytical approach that yielded unique data. Chapter 4 provided a detailed analysis of the data for each website, drawing conclusions about the intent, strategy, and influence of each website. Chapter 5 provided conclusions, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research.

APPENDIX A

CHECHNYA MAP



Source: UT Library Online. Perry Castaneda Library Map Collection. Available from [www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/chechnya\\_rel01.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/chechnya_rel01.jpg). Internet. Accessed on 02 January 2002.

## APPENDIX B

### INSTRUMENT

#### Narrative Level

1. Is there a stated purpose? What is it?
2. Are there news articles? What is the source?
3. Are there photos on the home page? If yes, of what? How many?
4. Are there graphics or synergies of visual elements? If yes, of what?
5. Are there audios or video? If yes, of what?
6. When was the site last updated?
7. Are there various font sizes, styles?
8. Are there logos, flags, or banners displayed?
9. Are there editorial or opinion articles? If yes, about what?
10. Is there a history available?
11. Are there advertisements on the website? If yes, of what?
12. Are “related sites” links?
13. Is the site available in multiple languages? If so, what languages?

### Technological Level

1. Is there a site map?
2. Are there links? How many are live? How many are deadends?
3. Is there a HELP or SEARCH function?
4. Are leading edge technologies used (Java, DHTML, peer-to-peer)?
5. Are there compression technologies (Realplayer, Flash, Beatnik)?
6. Is there audio or video broadcasting?
7. Is the URL (address) permanent?
8. Is there observed "downtime" for the site?
9. How is the site ranked in search engine results?
10. Is the Internet Service Provider identified?
11. Is there a link to other communication forms (fax, phone, cable)?

### Doctrinal

1. Is there a cultural/religious/ethnic affiliation?
2. Is there a recruiting tool? How? What type of action is required?
3. Is there a fundraising tool? How? What type of currency?
4. Is there a human interactivity/communication option? If so, which tools are available (electronic mail, chat, newsgroups, communities)?
5. Is there a networked chain to similar groups? If yes, who?
6. Is there an advocacy of swarming?
7. Is there a website methodology that outlines actions? If yes, how?

APPENDIX C  
CHECHEN REPUBLIC ONLINE HOMEPAGE

**• CHECHEN REPUBLIC ONLINE •**

**In Memory of Umalatova Yakha**

Chechen Republic Online website provides general public with the articles, current news and social life in Chechnya.

Chechen Republic Online website is developed by the team of people, devoted to Chechnya. Originally it was monitored by the Government of the Chechen Republic, but not any longer.

Currently, there is a war in Chechnya with russian invaders, and Chechen Officials joined the Armed Forces to protect their Motherland.

The war with Russia has been going on for centuries, usually every 50 years and lasted between 6 to 25 years.



Chechnya is a modern European society and Chechens have very strong respect for old people. Chechens are the best friends and are the worst enemies. The guest is a sacred person for the Chechen. Therefore, friendship is appreciated as highly as readiness to help those who are weak or needy.

HOME

ARTICLES

LANGUAGE

NEWS

WAR

IMAGES

MAPS

ART

AUDIO

PEOPLE

FORUM

CHAT

LINKS



[News](#)] [Language](#)] [War](#)] [Articles](#)] [Images](#)] [Maps](#)] [People](#)] [Art](#)] [Audio](#)] [Forum](#)] [Chat](#)] [Links](#)]

© 1996-2002 Chechen Republic Online - validate

Source: Chechen Republic Online. Available from [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com). Internet. Accessed on 02 January 2002.

## APPENDIX C

### CHECHEN REPUBLIC ONLINE FUND RAISING LINK

**• HELP CHECHNYA •**

## Help Chechnya and Chechen People by Donation

Dear Friends of Chechnya,

We would first like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest and sincerely desire to help the Chechen cause.

In the first Russian war in Chechnya (1994-1996), 100,000 Chechens have been killed, almost all civilians. In 1999, Russia launched another war with Chechnya. Massive bombing and countless killings created a flood of hungry, homeless and helpless refugees. Acts of brutality from Russian soldiers are common happening. Current war forced 300,000 Chechens to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring republics. Those who return, find their homes destroyed.

We ask for Your kind help.

Your donations will be sent through private sources from USA to Chechnya (there is no banking system in Chechnya, and if money goes through Russian banking system - it never reaches final destination and ends up in the pockets of Russian middlemen).

Chechnya is very small place, and people with somewhat communication skills can easily find out who is in the state of starvation and needs help most. Just to provide you with an example: people in Grozny drink water from the river, because that's the only source of water they got. Lack of potable water is among the largest problems. Lack of food, utilities services being nonexistent, hospitals lacking everything from medical supplies to equipment, a great percentage of the survivors being handicapped and infant mortality rate being extremely high are, unfortunately, common happenings in Chechnya these days.

Some amount from the donations will be directed towards changing the "negative public image" which has been created and fostered by the Russians as well as creating awareness about human rights violations which are occurring in Chechnya

If you would like to contribute - just click on the ribbon on your right to donate money to Chechen Republic Help Fund.

Thank You and God Bless You!

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Source: Chechen Republic Online. Available from [www.amina.com/help/](http://www.amina.com/help/). Internet. Accessed on 02 January 2002.

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<sup>1</sup>In February 1995, when Grozny was finally cleared of Chechen fighters, Russian casualties were reported as 1,426 killed, 4,630 wounded. Source: A. Kol'yev "Chechenskiy Kapkan," Biblioteka Kongressa Russkikh Obschin Moskva, 1997, 172. Total figures for the First Chechen War are estimated at 7,500 Russian and 3,500 Chechen fighters killed; an estimated 35,000 Chechen civilians were killed.

<sup>2</sup>Casualty reports differ depending on the source and are notoriously circumspect. Chechen dead are estimated at 5,000, with the heaviest casualties among civilians. Source: Federation of American Scientists, Military Analysis Network, "Second Chechnya War—1999-???", [www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/chechnya2.htm](http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/chechnya2.htm). The Russian Soldiers' Mothers Committee reports 3,000 dead and 6,000 wounded Russian soldiers.

<sup>3</sup> The sites are The Kavkaz News Center, [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org), The Chechen Republic Online, [www.amina.com](http://www.amina.com), and The Chechen Times, [www.chechnya.nl](http://www.chechnya.nl).

<sup>4</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars*, 323-342 is the source for the network analysis methodology. The model for effective websites is available online at [www.worldbestwebsites.com/criteria.htm](http://www.worldbestwebsites.com/criteria.htm). Components of each of these evaluation tools were combined to create the researcher's instrument.

<sup>5</sup> The Chechen fighters profiled are Shamil Basayev, Khamzat Gilayev, and Salman Raduev. Raduev, captured and imprisoned for terrorist acts, died in a Russian high-security prison camp on 15 December 2002, according to Russia's Justice Ministry. Source: Kansas City Star, "Chechen warlord, 35, dies in Russian Prison," December 16, 2002, A12.

<sup>6</sup> The change of CHAT from English to Chechen occurred sometime in late November or 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the average of articles published on the three days of observation, 16 November, 20 November, and 26 November 2002.