

**Gleaming City Rising From Ruins Can't Hide Psychic Scars of a War**  
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**By SETH MYDANS**



The newly constructed central mosque in Grozny, the once war-torn capital of Chechnya, frames a project of rising skyscrapers.

GROZNY, Russia — A spectacular complex of high-rise towers was inaugurated Wednesday in what once was the war-torn city of Grozny, with banners and flashing lights and celebrity guests including Vanessa-Mae on the violin.

A woman waited for a bus next to a wall scarred by bullets. Such traces of war are now rare in Grozny, with its newly built parks and broad avenues, fountains and flower beds.

The new Grozny City development is the centerpiece of a transformation that has changed the capital of [Chechnya](#) from the charred wreckage that was left after the wars of the 1990s and remained until only a few years ago.

In place of bombs and artillery, Moscow is pouring billions of rubles into a postwar Chechnya to support and mollify its chosen leader, President [Ramzan A. Kadyrov](#), a former guerrilla who once fought against Russian troops.

The buildings look out from as high as 45 stories over an entirely new city, with parks and broad avenues, fountains and flower beds, and hardly a scratch to remind it of more than a decade of separatist warfare.

In place of the shattered and empty carcass that the war left behind, a sort of fantasy Grozny is almost complete, including a fairground and ice-skating rink and plans for a water park, a racetrack, a cultural center and a [ski](#) resort.

"They finally realized that the war cost more," Andrei Mironov, who works with the Moscow-based human rights group Memorial, said of the Kremlin. "The Chechen regime looks like a winner who gets money from a defeated country."

The binge of construction and the emergence of a bright new Grozny are extraordinary developments in a republic with hardly any economy of its own. Unemployment stands at 85 percent, said Lyoma Turpalov, editor of Groznensky Rabochy, an independent weekly newspaper. But Chechnya subsists on huge subsidies from Moscow that are not publicly accounted for, he said.

No matter how much the city is remodeled, however, the trauma of the war continues to torment its residents, said Taisa Isayeva, 40, a former journalist who now reports on human rights abuses.

"You are judging by all this beautiful architecture but not by the psychology of the people," she said. "Everyone talks about the new buildings. For 15 or 16 years we all lived through war. We were just about ruined. Ninety percent of Chechens are psychologically sick."

For all the superficial trappings of peace and prosperity, Grozny can still be dangerous. It has been brought to heel by Mr. Kadyrov's strongman rule but its peaceful streets thrum with suppressed violence.

Police officers dressed in blue camouflage uniforms carry automatic rifles as they patrol the parks and coffee shops, the Academy of Beauty and Shoe Heaven, the pizza parlors and the tour agencies with posters advertising Mediterranean vacations.

Security was reported to be tight for Wednesday's celebration, which also marked Mr. Kadyrov's 35th birthday. Major roads were closed and there were reports that the police had gone house to house checking documents.

The Colombian singer Shakira denied [in a Twitter message](#) that she had been booked to attend the grand opening of Grozny City, but Mr. Kadyrov insisted that she had been and said she was frightened away by human rights groups that report continuing kidnappings and torture.

"Rights activists wrote a letter to Shakira telling her not to come to us, because the authorities here kill people, human rights are breached here," he said in a statement reported by Agence France-Presse. "Only enemies of the people could write this."

In return for its largess, the Kremlin has enjoyed relative stability in Chechnya in what is viewed in Moscow as a success for Prime Minister [Vladimir V. Putin's](#) policy of Chechenization.

The government in Moscow has ceded effective autonomy to Mr. Kadyrov and he is enforcing his own mandate that includes the imposition of Islamic standards, including a ban on alcohol and gambling and pressure on women to adopt Islamic dress.

"They enjoy the current situation," said Andrei Piontkovsky, a political commentator in Moscow. "They enjoy the fact that they are independent, plus getting generous money from Moscow."

Mr. Kadyrov and his men, many of whom have themselves come in from the forests, have succeeded in suppressing much of the insurgency, making Chechnya now one of the more stable republics in the restive North Caucasus region.

The epicenter of violence has shifted east to Chechnya's neighbor Dagestan, where the independent Internet news site Caucasian Knot calculated that 315 people had been killed and 224 had been wounded in the first nine months of the year. The numbers in Chechnya were 81 killed and 103 wounded, a steep reduction from just a few years ago.

Grozny's builders are upbeat. "Our city now is characteristic of a metropolis on the level of Moscow and St. Petersburg," said the chief architect, Nasukhanov Shadid.

But for many of those who lived through it, the conflict continues.

Zarema Utsiyeva, 38, a journalism professor, said the loss of both her son and her husband continued to haunt her. "Each person has his own war inside," she said.

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