This chapter will frustrate. Even more than in the Sri Lanka discussion, the Chechnya case study is full of vagueness, uncertainty and indistinction. The nature of the threats in Chechnya to humanitarian actors, Chechen and Russian civilians and the Russian state, coupled with the associated insecurity, fear pervasive in such a highly complex socio-political context, make for a rather challenging and provocative analysis. What follows are the results of using the securitisation framework to analyse the relationship between the Russian state and INGOs in the context of Chechnya during the second war and against the anti-NGO political atmosphere developing at the time. Some readers may disagree with the analysis as interpretations will vary between observers, as was discussed in the Sri Lanka case. The fact of conflicting narratives will evoke the critical themes of agency and truth. Throughout the discussion the questions of who and why should be kept in mind.

The Chechnya case study elaborates on the use of fear as discourse. Fear comes in many forms, but for humanitarian organisations working in zones of conflict fear most often relates to insecurity. The ACF attack and murders described in the Sri Lanka case study is an example, where a case of extreme violence perpetrated against humanitarian staff sent shock waves throughout the humanitarian community. Yet some contexts, such as Chechnya, witnessed a far wider-scale and more insidious environment of insecurity. For humanitarian organisations working in Chechnya it was not one incident, or even several incidents, of violence that could be pointed to, but literally dozens over many years and against a background of extreme violence faced by the civilian population. In such a context, concerns about security lead to an overriding atmosphere of fear. This can be considered a situation of indistinction between violence and the law, an important theme explored in the discussion below, as well as in the final two case studies.

Fear is not solely within the purview of violence, of course. Non-violent manifestations of fear, such as administrative rules, regulations and NGO laws that
threaten to interfere with the ability of organisations to work, also exist. Such bureaucratic and legal barriers help reinforce an environment of indistinction. The Sri Lanka case hinted at this in the discussion of the MoU negotiations and the work of the Parliamentary Select Committee, and this type of fear appears below in the discussion of the place of NGOs in Russia. This issue will also be prominent in the Ethiopia case presented in the next chapter. Fear of the law emerges as a common theme in the case studies.

A further form of fear is that of expulsion, always in the background as a possibility in any country – and Russia was no exception. A partial expulsion from the areas of conflict occurred in the Sri Lanka example, and this theme will be discussed in the Sudan case, where a whole-country expulsion occurred for an entire set of organisations. Being expelled from Chechnya was a constant fear, although paradoxically, as will be seen, remaining was the greater fear.

The Chechnya case study will focus on two of these aspects of fear: the indistinction between the law and violence, and bureaucratic and legal barriers. First, the political context surrounding the imposition of a new Russian NGO law will be briefly discussed as a way of highlighting some of the key themes defining the relationship between NGOs and the Russian state. Following this is an examination of the politics of fear in Chechnya, the core theme explored in this chapter. But the thematic of fear must first be examined to define a reference point before entering into the case study analysis.

It should be mentioned at the outset that this chapter is heavily informed by my own professional experience in Russia. I managed humanitarian operations in Chechnya and Ingushetia for a major international humanitarian organisation between 2003 and 2007, and was involved with the response to a kidnapping in Chechnya in 2001, as well as a second kidnapping in Dagestan in the 2003/4 period. Integrated into this chapter are also findings from a series of interviews I conducted with several Russian and international organisations during several field trips to Moscow and the North Caucasus between 2008 and 2015. The theme of the indistinction between fear and the law is, therefore, one of personal experience.

**Fear as discourse**

Fear can be thought of as a form of discourse. It can be manipulative, sub-textual and indirect in nature. Or it can be characterised as menacing, explicit and cautionary. This chapter examines the former view, where orders and directives are not laid down but rather clues provided as to the consequences of non-compliance, however ill defined the rules of the game. The law can be used to explicitly set down the formal rules that one is to follow. Often, however, informally constituted ‘prohibited actions’ exist outside the legal and administrative norms which other forms of discourse are utilised to ‘discuss’. In other words, there are unwritten rules and various indirect ways are found to communicate what they are and the consequences of breaking them. The game itself is political. George Orwell described political speech and writing as being ‘largely the defence of the
indefensible’, and as such, ‘political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness’ (Orwell, 1968: 136). This definition of political discourse describes well the use of fear, particularly the reliance on euphemism and vagueness – what is meant is something different from what is said, and what is left unsaid is as important as what is stated. Proper interpretation is demanded. The underlying threat, the risks taken for not reading well the writing on the wall, are only vaguely understood, particularly in a context of extreme violence.

A context of conflict such as Chechnya can be considered as a state of emergency, a time of ‘indistinction between violence and law’ (Agamben, 1993: 62). Such a space of indistinction creates an especially uncomfortable environment of ambiguity for INGOs. In any given case, will proper legal procedures, extra-legal means of persuasion, expulsion or even physical force be used as a method of control? This is, of course, a one-sided question, as the state holds the monopoly of violence, and the only recourse norms-based external actors have is to refer to the law. The state has options, can choose between the two, while the external actors must suffer the consequences of that choice. Laws change – they are not sacrosanct, but malleable, even if embedded in certain domestically and internationally recognised norms of behaviour. How these laws are formulated is unclear from the external perspective. Such a context is a time of pervasive insecurity, where trust in the rule of law faces an increase.

From a sovereign’s perspective, fear can be a useful, even requisite, tool. Famously, Machiavelli thought that for the prince there was greater security in being feared than in being loved. In the Freudian view, humans respond more immediately to threats, based on self-interest and self-preservation, than to adoration of a leader or a system. Thomas Hobbes also saw the value of fear: ‘Plunged into a civil war by a movement led by bold visionaries, Hobbes regarded the politics of fear as the precondition for the consolidation of order and stability’ (Furedi, 2005: 133). Stability is established when the population fears stepping out of the order in which society is embedded. In this way, political leadership can be defined as the management of the politics of fear. This is clearly the case domestically, but also applies to international actors, whether working within or outside the country.

The discourse of fear must be contextualised, as every political environment is different. To a state, discourses of security are ‘neither strictly objective assessments nor analytical constructs of threat, but rather the products of historical structures and processes, of struggles for power within the state, of conflicts between the societal groupings that inhabit states and the interests that besiege them’ (Lipschutz, 1995: 8). Contemporary events and political struggles are related to historical patterns of behaviour and are embedded in society. These must all be unpacked to fully understand the context of fear. In each of this book’s case studies a different context of fear is described.

There are many types of fear – of losing a family member, becoming seriously ill, having one’s home destroyed by a calamity, or losing one’s job. A more primal fear is to suffer physical or mental trauma through violence, particularly when one
cannot defend oneself. This is the case as much for organisations and communities as it is for individuals and families. Social units, of whichever scale, are as affected by trauma as a person. As an example of an affected community, we can reflect on ethnographic research conducted on the survival tactics of Mayan war widows in the highlands of Guatemala in the late 1980s. These women were affected by la violencia – counterterrorism operations and repression in the 1970s and 1980s, which included disappearances, killings and rape. Fear is of course a natural response to danger, ‘but in Guatemala rather than being solely a subjective personal experience fear has also penetrated the social memory. And rather than an acute reaction it is a chronic condition’. Rather than being a one-off situation or a short-lasting condition, ‘the effects of fear are pervasive and insidious in Guatemala’. In such a context ‘fear is the arbiter of power: invisible, indeterminate, and silent’ (Green, 1999: 55). The memories of violence, the fear they have instilled, and the threat of future occurrences, are all powerful emotions and motivators, yet difficult to articulate, to hear, or to even really see. This is the realm of indistinction, and the Guatemala example should be kept in mind as the Chechnya case study progresses. Fear as an ‘arbiter of power’ is an especially informative concept, and it is worthwhile to take a few moments to contemplate the significance of the idea.

Violence also comes in many forms – from a mugging with a knife to the use of weapons of mass destruction; from a kidnapping to a mass expulsion of an entire population; from a nuide, to a genoc ide ‘11 ; f r m x or w r e a specific type of all-encompassing violent engagement, set against a background of unique cultural and social relationships (Nordstrom, 2004). War affects society in general, combatants as well as civilians, young and old, civil society as well as governmental institutions. Disruption cannot be avoided, tough decisions must be made by all parties concerned, and action will be forced. One constant in all conflicts is fear of violence and its consequences.

Three important perspectives can be taken from this brief discussion. The first is that fear is a useful tool to be used by governments – fear is an arbiter of power. To be useful, fear must be enacted, and this is accomplished by discourse grounded in ambiguity and based on threats the source of which may not be visible. And second, for the civilians or organisations that are the targets of the discourse of fear and their associated violent actions, there is no possibility for transparent conversation, as the topic is not open for discussion. Yet memories of violence persist and the threat of future occurrences pervades one’s thoughts. And third, the context of violence in which fear is felt will be somehow set against the law, as formal rules by which organisations must live will remain in place guiding behaviour. The discourse of fear then becomes an arbiter between violence and the law.

Two manifestations of fear are discussed below. The first elaborates on the political environment from which a new NGO legal framework emerged in the 2005/6 period. The purpose is not to discuss the NGO law per se, but to analyse the politics surrounding the new law and the socio-political pressures that prompted it. Key points will be extracted to elaborate on the background context informing the state–INGO relationship in Russia, against which operations in Chechnya were
implemented. The second is to go back earlier into the noughts, to Chechnya during the second war. In this era politics informed the INGO environment in a different way, through the politics of fear. This analysis will concentrate on the role of insecurity in the management of INGOs. The key themes are indistinction and fear, set within the analytical framework as used in the Sri Lanka case study.

It will be remembered that a useful way of structuring an analysis is to review how differences were created, how messages were organised, how those messages were meant to be understood, and what action was being justified. And finally, to discuss the actual practice. In this, as well as the other thematic studies, this basic structure will underpin the discussion, but will not be referred to as strictly as in the Sri Lanka case. It is worthwhile to have this structure in mind, but as comfort levels increase with the analytical process, the steps can be used to inform rather than dictate the structure of presentation.

**Indistinction**

As with the other case studies, it is important to not ‘black box’ the internal, but rather to examine how a country interpreted itself and to investigate the ‘nature and interrelationship between state identity and security, and the key principles, norms, discourses and parameters within this relationship’ (Snetkov, 2015: 4–5). It is within this space that INGOs must manoeuvre, and in practice a much deeper historical analysis would be conducted to situate an INGO within this space, but for the purposes of this case study broad outlines must suffice. The book provides guidance on process rather than a comprehensive set of detailed case studies.

Looking from the outside, Russia is obviously a ‘strong state’, a self-identity to keep in mind. It is the successor state to the USSR, a nuclear power, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and a major producer of oil, natural gas and minerals. If no longer a global power, it is most certainly a regional power. Confusingly for many INGOs, it is partly in Europe, yet somehow apart, somehow Asian, intimately linked to Europe by political, security and economic interests, although the relationship with the West is ambiguous and challenging. Where lies the centre of gravity in the relationship, and who is weak and who is strong? When discussing potential support on several advocacy themes with a representative from the Moscow embassy of a European country in 2006, the response was enlightening: ‘But what can we do about Russia? We have no leverage!’ The relationship with the West, and its representatives, including NGOs, is contested, possibilities for influence limited and the parameters of negotiation uncertain.

Moving to the internal view, this section focuses on the ambiguity behind the 2006 NGO law and the politics associated with its implementation. The objective

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1 This section is informed by interviews I conducted with Russian NGOs in Moscow in the 2008–2015 period, the purpose of which was to discuss the development of the relationship between the state and NGOs, particularly related to the NGO laws. It is also based on my experience managing the process of registration of a foreign organisation in 2006.
is to introduce some of the key components of the relationship between the Government of Russia and NGOs, not to critique the law itself. As is stressed in this book, the political environment is the key factor for INGOs to understand and find constructive ways of interpreting. Administrative regulations and laws do not spring out of nowhere but are manifestations of political decisions. In some contexts, the legal environment, although difficult to manoeuvre, is straightforward, and it is possible to use it to guide how one negotiates access with the authorities. In other situations, inherent ambiguities in the law create an uncertain environment that engenders fear in the NGO community, a useful state from a government’s perspective.

Following more than two years of increased tensions in the working environment for NGOs in Russia, the law ‘On Introducing Amendments into Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation’ came into effect on 15 April 2006. The new law amended four existing laws related to civil society. These amendments enabled the authorities to: 1) deny registration to any organisation whose ‘goals and objectives … create a threat to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity, unique character, cultural heritage, and national interests of the Russian Federation’; 2) prohibit, on rather ambiguous grounds, the implementation of programmes of foreign NGOs or the transfer of funds to local branches; 3) request any information from organisations, including source and purpose of funds, and activities, and, 4) insist on the presence of governmental representatives at any NGO event. Annual reports about donations and their use were also to be submitted (Machalek, 2012).

Registration requirements were burdensome – detailed information was requested and roughly a hundred pages of forms had to be filled out. Information on the organisation’s founders was requested, regardless of when the organisation was established, including death certificates for deceased founders. The process diverted administrative and managerial resources from programme implementation to the registration file, both in Russia and at the organisation’s headquarters. Some organisations had to stop work temporarily until their paperwork could be completed properly, which sometimes took multiple attempts as the process was very complicated. The process made NGOs uncertain about their place in the socio-political order (Kamhi, 2006).

The law allowed the state to divide organisations into good and bad categories – the law would assist the good and deter the bad. As in Ethiopia, which will be discussed in the next chapter, with the 2006 NGO law the ‘Russian state sought to reinstate its control over all non-state activity’, and conflated domestic insecurities with threats from the West (Snetkov, 2015: 108–109). International human rights, humanitarian, and democracy NGOs were almost all Western and considered to be linked to a Western agenda harmful to Russian interests. Specific to the former Soviet space, a fear of the ‘colour revolutions’ (the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Rose Revolution in Georgia, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan – all taking place between 2003 and 2005) was also in play, revolutions thought to be influenced by the work of Western NGOs. The proper relationship between
Russia and the West was a perennial question, and one that was progressively becoming more sensitive. The law gave the state the ability to sort through who was a friend and who was an enemy. But for the NGOs themselves, the criteria were not very clear.

It should be stressed, however, that there were a great many legal issues for INGOs to overcome – the NGO law was only one of them. The bureaucratic context in Russia was highly complex and administratively burdensome. In the end, the NGO law had little long-term effects on those organisations that had the resources and will to persevere, though it had a winnowing effect on those that did not. But this was the crucial point. To many international observers, the NGO law contravened the principles governments were expected to respect when enacting such laws: laws were to be proportionate, fit for a democratic society, and have legitimate aims. Was, in fact, the actual purpose of the law to decrease the numbers of NGOs through administrative means? Were the requirements too onerous and out of proportion to the needs of the state? And was the state acting ‘democratically’ by lessening the space for civil society actors? There was also concern that the law had a punitive dimension embedded in its provisions (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Was one of its purposes to punish NGOs that had stepped out of line? The themes of punishment and retribution will resurface in subsequent case studies.

A common explanation amongst the NGO community in Moscow at the time for why the ‘repressive law’ against NGOs was put into place was that the state, which by consensus was an ‘authoritarian regime’, was afraid of anyone or any organisation that became too popular and too appreciated. Adulation was reserved for those in power. As a representative of one Moscow NGO put it: ‘The same happened in China. When an NGO promoting healthy lifestyle [Feng Shui], which has absolutely nothing to do with politics, gained more members than the communist party, horrible repressions against it were imposed, its leaders were killed and imprisoned’. Others focused on the bright side and observed that there were also some positive aspects to the law. It was true that NGOs dealing with human rights or political issues were under a lot of pressure, but those dealing solely with social issues managed to have fruitful negotiations with the government. For example, the reform of orphanages was highly influenced by NGOs. Therefore, although repression existed, there remained room for manoeuvre for certain types of organisations working on less sensitive issues.

Along the lines of this way of approaching the issue, some NGOs highlighted the fact that there ‘were reasonable people in the government, some of which might truly strive to solve social issues and not only use them for propagandistic purposes’. Success or failure depended on the mindset of each person, regardless of the law. But when one started out working with one part of the government, it was unpredictable what kind of person would be in a decision-making post and how he or she would react to one’s proposals. As another NGO representative said: ‘It’s difficult to say where the line is between what is perceived by the power structure as purely social and political, and to forecast how it may react on some of your actions.’ But, ‘if they see that in your publications you criticise the opponents
to Russia, or at least that you critique both sides of a question, I think they would not perceive you as an enemy’. Possibilities existed, but ambiguity persisted.

To many NGOs, therefore, governmental relations were prioritised over public relations, as the government made the key decisions. Yet, was there not still a role for public communications? One view was that any NGO which did a concrete job helping actual people, such as providing medical help, would also understand the causes of the problems they were addressing and have an opinion on the ways to change the system to improve it – not just for the few people the NGO engaged with, but for the whole population. To change the system an organisation should speak out about it. If it doesn’t speak it does harm. Raising one’s profile in such a way wouldn’t do harm if the programming was thought innocuous – on the contrary, it would enable it to get support from the public and the non-profits community and, ultimately, the government. Protecting one’s reputation, ensuring positive media coverage and encouraging public support remained viable tools for organisations to continue their work and reach their objectives.

Several key points should be taken away from this discussion, all related to indistinction. First, there is a link between the domestic and the international. The relationship between the government and foreign actors working in Russia was obviously informed by the geo-political context and how domestic politics aligned, or not, with international pressures and norms. This was clearly evident in the Sri Lanka case, and it was equally true for Russia at a timeframe. Ethiopia and Sudan, as will be seen. But every country and government internal to an international context operationalises these tensions and contested identities differently. A common theme across humanitarian crises is the enactment of tougher new NGO laws, partly as a response to tensions in domestic–international engagement, but the internal political dimensions are unique to each context. At the centre is an indistinction between the role of domestic and international norms. Intensive research is needed by NGOs to understand this uniqueness and to try to shed light on the balance between normative frameworks.

Second, what defines ‘political’ is ambiguous. What is political is in the eye of the beholder, which is the government, representing a state and its social and historical identity. In this way, the friends and enemies distinction may be the most useful method in determining the parameters of the political. By developing an instinct for knowing who is in which category and being able to articulate why, an external actor may be able to grasp the parameters of the political. And third, related to this, the Russian political order was not monolithic and the approach to NGO programming varied between components of the government and over time. In addition, at lower levels of power decisions were interpreted, and interpretations varied based on the local context. Even if, ultimately, the sovereign decides, it should never be thought that a government is monolithic.

A fourth point relates to the question of how much public opinion mattered in the equation. Was civil society able to influence governmental decisions? In a context of a relatively safe zone being created for certain types of organisations – those seen to be innocuous and doing worthwhile work, did this create more space
for advocacy, and if so, how was the public involved with this? Connected to this question, fifth, was the idea that speaking out publicly was generally a risky business, regardless of the answer to the previous question. As many thought, it was the very challenge to the state that prompted the revision of the law in the first place, squaring the circle of indistinction.

The discussion about the NGO law elaborated on some general trends in the relationship between the Russian state and NGOs. International NGOs operating in the North Caucasus, however, faced deeper problems as their work engaged directly with a conflict-affected population. If ambiguities were created through legal means later in the noughts, the beginning of the century had seen a different type of ambiguity, one more appropriate to a context of overt violence.

**Chechnya – politics of fear**

The law itself was not the most important issue for those working in Chechnya, although the political context from which the NGO law sprang was essential background. Though not yet codified in the new law on registration, legal ambiguities prevailed and extra-legal mechanisms were always available to manage NGOs. The most insidious control tactic was the use of fear, based on a very real context of violence and insecurity. First, fear needs to be contextualised. What did Chechnya mean? What happened?

The modern Chechen war – or there was intense conflict in the nineteenth century, the ‘Chechen problem’ was not new – came in two distinct periods, with an anarchic interwar period separating them. The first war took place between 1994 and 1996, the interwar period between 1996 and 1999, and the second war began in 1999; it is left to the individual observer to decide on the end date, or whether the second conflict has indeed ended. It is impossible to calculate the cost of the wars with any accuracy, but it is safe to say that thousands died on the Russian side and potentially 200,000 on the Chechen side. This chapter does not aim to provide a full review of the wars, but presents dichotomies to illuminate some key points.

The first war can be thought of as a ‘traditional war’. The primary objective was to re-establish Russian sovereignty over the territory of Chechnya, necessitated by the secessionist movement. The second war is more properly thought of as a counter-terrorism operation, where the goal was less about controlling territory than controlling the Chechen people. The second war ‘was an instrument to reformulate Russian nationalism along racist lines that excluded peoples from the Caucasus, depicted as uncivilized and barbarian’ (Lacassagne, 2010: 167). The

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2 This section is informed by personal experience in being part of the response to two North Caucasus kidnappings and having managed humanitarian operations in Chechnya, Ingushetia and, later, Dagestan, when the kidnapping threat remained high.

second war was an existential threat by the Chechens to the Russian state and people. In this view, the Russian population was slowly convinced of the necessity of the first war, but in the second war there was an active call for a violent response (Wilhelmsen, 2017). What changed was how deeply the Chechens were securitised.

This case study examines the second war, and it is argued that NGOs as well as the Chechen population were securitised. The threat from Chechnya in late 1999 reached the ‘existential threat’ level in official discourse, while the ‘opposition and independent groups, such as the media and NGOs, that were involved with and continued to work on the issue of Chechnya were increasingly securitised themselves as part of Russia’s widening security agenda in its domestic sphere’ (Snetkov, 2015: 83). As seen in the Sri Lanka case study, on the generic level this process is straightforward. The uniqueness of each situation is in the type of discourse used as part of the securitisation process. In Chechnya during the second war, it is argued that fear was the form discourse took, against a background of intense insecurity.

One of the eternal questions in Chechnya was – why not just kick the INGOs out? Moscow had the control mechanisms to do it, as much as Colombo did in expelling NGOs working in the Vanni, Khartoum in relation to NGOs working in Darfur or Addis Ababa regarding agencies working in the Ogaden, as will be seen in the next chapters. In a state of exception, it is even easier to disallow the presence of organisations. With a robust legal system in place and the ability to expel through administrative means, why let INGOs continue to work in such a sensitive context? As stated by one Russian NGO, the Russian government was ‘schizophrenic’ and had two conflicting thoughts in its mind at the same time. One was that everyone was an enemy and NGOs should be destroyed, the second that there were real problems in the social and healthcare sectors that need to be solved. ‘When you deal with schizophrenics it’s impossible to make a forecast for the future!’ And anyway, does one ever know what the truth actually is?

What, concretely, could be gained from NGOs? Resources themselves were not needed, but the ability of NGOs to work directly with the Chechen population was helpful. The government didn’t need to provide services if the NGOs did, which would have necessitated creating a parallel aid structure they were not used to operating; and given the ‘tensions’ between the Russians and the Chechens, wasn’t it easier to let the INGOs implement the work? This was especially the case with the provision of aid to the Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia. Looking externally, there wasn’t a great deal of harm to be done by the NGOs if they were properly managed. It was even valuable to be seen to be letting NGOs remain.

In this view, the Russian government tolerated humanitarian NGOs because it saw them as useful, as opposed to human rights organisations, which did not provide any useful services, but only created problems for the government. Humanitarian organisations were considered less politically engaged, or at least had to remain that way to continue to be tolerable. This was the unwritten contract between NGOs
and the government. There was concern in the sector, however, that in remaining non-political they lost their chance to influence the situation (Gilligan, 2010: 104–105). But outside advocating for purely technical improvements, was it even possible to influence the situation? For most organisations the answer was no, and so a silent, apolitical stance was justified.

None of this was ever satisfactory as an explanation, but it was impossible to really know, and the consensus was that it was meant to be that way – ambiguity was at the centre of the strategy of control. What was unambiguously known was that Chechnya was dangerous for the population as well as for NGOs. Where did the danger come from? Chechnya could be looked at as a matrix organisational structure, where reporting lines did not follow a normal hierarchical structure. The issue was that it was impossible to know who worked for whom, and in what function, at any given time. There were many different types of security personnel present (local and federal), rebels of various sorts (Chechen nationalists and jihadists), and pro-Moscow local commanders, each of which followed a different trajectory of allegiance. Which side was each on? And was it only one side, or an ad hoc combination changing with the situation? Theories piled on top of suspicions heaped over yet more conspiracy theories. The normal instinct, however, is to look for agency – who was actually in charge? Whoever was responsible for any given incident, it was widely assumed that the ultimate boss – or at least the origin of influence or direction – was variously situated in Moscow. In the end, it was really hard to tell what was going on, but some sort of narrative had to be constructed.

In this environment of fear and ambiguity, kidnapping was the major issue. Kidnapping is an especially pernicious threat. More than with a murder, a kidnapping traumatises an organisation and the humanitarian community at large. A murder is over with quickly, but a case of kidnapping lasts for an extended period of time, often months or even years. A kidnapping holds not only the hostage captive, but the organisation as well. The unknowns are especially traumatic – the unknown condition of the hostage, or even whether they are alive; the unknown conditions of release; and, of course, the unknown timeframe of release. It is a similar case for the entire humanitarian community in the location, as kidnappings have a damaging effect on the whole community.

It is not necessary to go through the whole sordid tale of kidnappings in the North Caucasus. Suffice it to say that there were dozens of kidnappings of international staff and hundreds more of local aid workers, human rights workers, journalists, and civilians of all types. Kidnapping for ransom had ‘spiralled out of control’ by 1997 (Gall and de Waal, 1997: 369). Aid workers, journalists, human rights workers, were enemies, especially in periods when the Chechens were winning the propaganda war, as was the case in the first war (Russell, 2007: 111).

For vivid descriptions of kidnapping ordeals, see Vincent Cochetel, www.ted.com/talks/vincent_cochetel_i_was_held_hostage_for_317_days_here_s_what_i_thought_abou/
Some, such as Fred Cuny, were never found. Some, such as a group of telecoms workers, turned up beheaded. The kidnappings of Camilla Carr and Jonathan James in Chechnya in the interwar years and Arjan Erkel in Dagestan during the second war lasted for many months – 14 and 20, respectively. Foreign and Russian journalists were kidnapped and the message was clear: don’t come here. Aid workers were taken in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and even in Kabardino-Balkaria. Some organisations had multiple kidnappings – MSF had four kidnappings over the years, from Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan.

Explanations for the kidnappings varied. Were they for money, to deny access, as retribution or politically motivated? Or all of the above, mixed and matched differently each time? Definitive explanations were rare, and suspect if held. But whoever was responsible, the result was clear – little reporting about the situation and a less negative image in the media (Roshchin, 2014: 125).

The violence was not limited to kidnappings – one of the most egregious security incidents occurred on 17 December 1996 when six international ICRC workers were murdered at the hospital in Novy Atagi. Regardless of the type, security incidents have a chilling effect. The ACF killings in Sri Lanka, the MSF-B kidnappings in Sudan (as will be discussed in the last case study), clan violence in Somalia or car-jackings in Chad, they all spread fear. Security incidents can be used as a reason to limit access, such as the Vanni 2009, but rarely has a security threat been so dominant in a context as much as in the North Caucasus.

But as is human nature, a narrative was built. The government feared speaking out, so stay away from that. Kidnappings were used as retribution. Threats were used as control measures. There was a ‘climate of impunity in Chechnya created by the disregard of the rule of law, the “weapons culture” and the fragmentation of the conflict [all] contributed to a negative atmosphere towards humanitarian actors’ (European Commission, 2001). The effect on the humanitarian community was often to leave: on 10 January 2001, all INGOs funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) suspended their operations due to the kidnapping of an MSF expat. There were limits to the usefulness of narratives in the face of such extreme violence.

As a way of discussing fear as discourse, three themes related to the kidnapping threat should be elaborated upon: indeterminacy, invisibility and silence.

One of the key issues that added to the fear felt by humanitarian organisations was never knowing from whom the threat actually emanated, as it was impossible to ever really know for sure. This is the question of agency. This situation prompted guessing, second-guessing and, frequently, inaction, an often-dangerous tactic. The narrative was that the government always had something to do with the prevailing insecurity, kidnappings in particular, but other actors were certainly involved – criminals, rebels, local warlords. But were the others linked with the government or were they independent? Spin those thoughts around for a while and they lead always to the same place – indeterminacy.

A second key issue was that kidnappings were the definition of invisibility. People were taken away, were suddenly gone, were made invisible. As described
above, one of the most profound fears concerning kidnappings was the unknowns. You don’t see the tank firing at you or go into a bunker to avoid the missile you know is coming. It can happen any time, anywhere, to anyone, and then … nothing but uncertainty and invisibility.

The third key issue is silence. The elephant in the room was not often spoken about, or only in hushed tones. There was surprisingly little direct discussion about kidnappings and the kidnapping risk, and complete secrecy when it happened. Somehow, speaking about the threat made it more real, or increased the likelihood of something happening. Were the authorities listening? Wasn’t it bad to even label the threat, as then the perpetrators would become annoyed that the secret was out? Silence was better. Keep the discussions in-house and do not discuss it publicly. Like the bare-life period in Sri Lanka, INGOs on this issue became voiceless.

This case study has not attempted to make definitive statements about the ultimate origin of the kidnapping threat in Chechnya. As with the question of agency, to a large extent objective truth is beside the point. It was the narrative that mattered. As an object of study, the thoughts and perceptions implicit in the narrative, as well as the consequences of these beliefs, are what matters. Fear ruled, and whether purposeful or not, was an effective control mechanism. In this view, fear was the discourse used in the securitisation process. This process will be discussed next.

**Fear as securitisation**

Applying the securitisation framework as proposed in this book to Chechnya uncovered interesting findings, some of which are at variance to the model as presented in the Sri Lanka case study. As elaborated upon above, when analysing the state–INGO relationship in Russia generally and Chechnya specifically, it was discovered that fear was the most prominent discourse applied to the relationship. There are, however, a few unanswered questions related to this finding, the most pressing of which concerns agency. This question will be addressed before fear and the allied theme of indistinction are integrated into the securitisation framework more generally.

**Agency?**

Agency has become a catchword in the humanitarian sector and often refers to the capacity of beneficiaries to control their own destinies. Here, agency is used to describe both an actor (an ‘agent’), who has the capacity to act, and the manifestation of that capacity – without action agency is not present. Important to this concept is intentionality – the actor must intend the action to occur. Agency therefore should be understood as the exercise of an actor’s intention to act. In the securitisation process as argued in this book, the state has agency; without agency securitisation is not possible. A state must intend to securitise, must have the capacity to securitise, and must actually perform the actions that lead to securitisation.

Some of the primary questions posed by the Chechnya case study relate to the question of agency. Was there agency behind the use of fear as securitisation
discourse, and if so, who was the agent? In other words, was there a state agent who exercised the intention to use fear as a control tactic? Did a governmental agent either create the environment of fear, or at least consciously use it as an INGO-management technique? And an even deeper question: in the Chechnya case, does the question of agency matter?

The dominant narrative for INGOs working in Chechnya was that, at some level, agency sat at the top of the Russian political structure, actioned by the security services. Somewhere there was a puppet master who used his strings to make various elements of the matrix structure dance. And the audience of the dance was INGOs. Maybe there wasn’t direct cause and effect, but in the shadows, one could always, however dimly, see the hands of the puppet master, and he lived in Moscow. Whether this was true or not could not be proven, yet agency was assumed. And, in fact, this conclusion was used to prove the fact itself; if cause and effect could not be demonstrated, it only meant that the puppet master was good at his job. In such a circle of self-referencing logic there was no escape.

Neither this case study, nor any other, is capable of providing an unequivocal answer to the question of whether agency existed or, if it did, where it sat. The only statement that can be made is that that was the belief. Therefore, as to the final question: does it matter if there is truth to the narrative? Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that, if INGOs were to properly understand the context, the risks they faced, learn how to operate safely and maybe even de-securitise themselves, ‘truth’ did matter. But in the other sense, ‘truth’ didn’t matter, that was simply the security context, and through trial and error INGOs found a way to work and a narrative – a theory – was developed to explain the facts; a theory which, if rigorously followed, would keep INGOs safe. Whether there was even a conscious sense on the part of the political elites and the security services that this was the operational theory of INGOs did not matter. As curious humans, we want to find the truth, but sometimes we must settle for what works.

For the purposes of the following analysis the narrative will be taken at face value. Agency sat at the highest level in the state and fear was consciously used as a form of discourse in a process of securitisation of INGOs working in Chechnya. The next section will summarise the argument for fear as discourse, relating it to the concept of indistinction, followed by a discussion of the securitisation process in Chechnya.

**Fear as discourse**

States find different ways to deal with the external. This can be straightforward or ambiguous. Discourse can be textual or sub-textual. In the Sri Lanka case discourse was considered to be governmental statements, the media and editorials. Actions also spoke loudly. What was the case in Russia related to INGOs working in Chechnya?

Indistinction between violence and the law is at the core of the process. The process should not be thought of as creating clear-cut categories, each situation is
unique and some are clearer than others. Fear, as manifested in the primary threat of kidnapping, consisted of indeterminacy, invisibility and silence, and this characterisation can be used more generally to describe fear. Threats existed – empirical evidence could not be denied, and although the source was indeterminant, some sort of theory of action was needed, however ill defined. But to a large extent this made discourse invisible, compared with the sort of textual discourse examined in the Sri Lanka case study. Even with a dominant narrative, there was still silence about the core issue, as the sources of fear were hard to talk about openly in a context of indistinction between violence and law.

**Securitisation**

Putting it all together, how did the securitisation process work in the Chechnya case? The framework is useful as a starting point, and areas of modification will be elaborated on as they appear.

The existential threat involved two layers of analysis. On one level, the existential threat concerned the general background of civil society in Russia. There was a fear of political interference by the West, especially by human rights and ‘democracy’ groups. The authorities demanded to be at the centre and would not abide others becoming more popular than they were. In the eyes of the state, Russia was more important than the Russians, and the state was the protector of Russia. A threat to the state was an existential threat to Russia, whether from Russians or foreigners.

Against this backdrop, Chechnya created an even more sensitive case and another level of existential threat. Speaking out on what organisations witnessed in Chechnya could not be tolerated by the state. The story was too gruesome for outsiders to hear. Whatever good INGOs did, they were not allowed to do harm to the state through communicating what they saw. The sovereign was to decide on what was proper action without external interference. In Chechnya, also, there was a conflation of the feared Chechens and NGOs and of Chechnya and the West. It was assumed that the West and INGOs were on the side of Chechens, or at least not on the Russian side. The referent object – the object threatened – was therefore the state, as a personification of Russia. Such a view goes a long way to articulating why the threat was existential. Interestingly, the securitising agent was also the state: the centre, the Kremlin, the sovereign. The state was at the centre of everything.

In the second war the Chechens, Chechnya and the associated external actors involved with the conflict were actively securitised by the state through a range of media. The general population had to be convinced to accept the war and the actions of the state in prosecuting the war, a war labelled a counter-terrorism operation. This process was successful and there wasn’t as much bad press about the war as there had been during the first war. One method to ensure this continued to be the case was to limit witnesses, including journalists, but also humanitarian NGOs. The open question is, was this smaller securitisation process – targeted specifically against humanitarian INGOs – located within a larger securitisation...
process following the same rules, i.e. against the rebellious Chechens? It is ques-
tionable whether state action against NGOs had to be justified to the general population on more than a cursory level. What was important was to justify state action against the Chechens. In this sense, the discourse of fear this chapter has elaborated upon had no audience outside the intended targets, the INGOs.

Taking the standard narrative at face value, fear was the discourse utilised in the securitisation process. It is argued that fear is always present as discourse and is an underlying component of the securitisation process. But in some cases, fear becomes the dominant theme and an actual form of discourse. In such a context, defining friends and enemies becomes close to being literal. The risks inherent in being labelled an enemy were extremely high.

Another interesting element in the Chechnya case relates to the definition of a state of exception in such a context. Could it be that in some contexts a state of exception is not episodic in nature, as a reaction to an emerging threat, but, paradoxically, a normal state of being? Against what reference point is the designation of a state of exception to be determined? If true, a more permanent state of exception would be an important perspective for an external agent to grasp. The indistinction between law and violence may thus be a constant in some contexts.

**Conclusion**

The point of these case studies is not to answer contextual questions or to fit empirical evidence into a theoretical straightjacket, but rather to expand the proposed theoretical framework to account for real-world cases. What has been learned in this chapter that should be taken into the others are two main points. The first is that the securitisation process is unique to each context. If there is general value to the concept, it must be modified to fit the realities of each country, each political system and each type of conflict. Regarding the Chechnya case, it had to be modified in relation to the role of agency, for example. The second point is that indistinction and fear are important concepts to be kept in mind, as they were in the Sri Lanka case. Chechnya merely extenuated the importance of the themes. In the next chapters fear and indistinction will occur but other themes will dominate – specifically, the law and expulsion.

**References**


